

A Most Important Holiday Conversation

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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As we gather with family and friends during the holidays, health care providers want you to think about discussing more than just what flavor of pie to serve or who is bringing what to the gathering.

It's a perfect time to discuss what your wishes are when it comes to medical care or other directives, especially as we age.

Surveys have shown that about 80% of adults believe it's important to have these conversations, and yet only about 30% of us have actually done so and documented them.

"It's a challenge because nobody likes to bring these things up. Nobody wants to talk to mom about 'what do you want mom if you get really sick or if you're dying?' Moms often will bring it up and will say to their kids things like 'I have some important things that I need to discuss with you and now's a good time to do it,'" says Robert Sawicki, MD, Vice President Clinical Services for OSF HealthCare.

Dr. Sawicki oversees the work of the supportive care team at OSF HealthCare. He says years ago families lived in close proximity for most of their lives, but our more mobile society of today means that those times when family is all together are even more important for having conversations that are best done in person, before they become a crisis.

"Crisis decision making is the worst time. You're not thinking clearly, there's too many emotions going on, it brings up a lot of old issues and baggage that may not even be relevant but at the time it feels so very important to this individual that their voice heard. If you've got those things designated ahead of time the conversations can still be difficult but at least you know where the loved one is in those conversations."

Dr. Sawicki says the most important thing to discuss is who is going to speak for you if you're sick and not able to communicate your wishes about the care you want, including life-extending measures. Putting advance care directives in writing, including a formal, signed, health care power of attorney, is vital to having any medical decisions carried out the way YOU want them to be.

"The most important thing is not to be afraid of it. Talking about these things doesn't make them happen, it does not create fear and anxiety so much as when it's done it's actually a relief - thank goodness we were able to talk about this - and it actually brings families closer together and isn't that what the holidays are all about?"

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