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"GUEST COLUMN /McNIELLY: The tools to making key health care decisions"

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By Madeleine Mcnielly

On Saturday, April 16, designated as National Health Care Decisions Day, the Attleboro Council on Aging, along with other national, state and community organizations, is leading an effort to highlight the importance of advance health care decision-making.

For many people, the words estate planning may conjure up thoughts of large inheritances and tax shelters. But planning isn't just about death and taxes; it's also about what happens if you get very sick and live. All adults can benefit from thinking about what their health care choices would be if they are unable to speak for themselves. These decisions can be written down in an advance directive so that others know what they are. Communicating your health care needs to loved ones in advance ensures your end-of-life wishes will be honored.

The Attleboro Council on Aging provides information and tools for seniors to talk about their wishes with family, friends and health care providers, and execute written health care proxies in accordance with Massachusetts state laws. A health care proxy allows you to appoint an agent to make health decisions if you become incapacitated and unable to do so on your own. Health care proxy forms and wallet cards are available at the council on aging at no cost through the outreach department at the Larson Senior Center, 25 South Main St., or can be obtained at www.nationalhealthcaredecisionsday.org.

At 10 a.m. on Monday, April 11, the Attleboro Council on Aging is planning a free educational program, presented by Melissa Roberts Weidman, director of community relations and outreach for **HopeHealth**: "The Road We're All On: Healthy Planning for Healthy Aging."

This session will help plan for the challenges of coping with serious illness. There will be an overview of resources everyone should know about before there is a crisis, issues to consider and solutions to be found. You may be surprised to learn about the wide range of services available that can provide expert care delivered wherever you are, covered by Medicare and all private insurance.

A free program, sponsored by local elder law attorneys, "Five Essential Planning Documents for Seniors," will be offered on Friday April 22 at state Rep. Betty Poirier's fourth Senior Spectacular Event. That event will be held 9 a.m.-2 p.m. at North Attleboro Middle School.

As a result of National Health Care Decisions Day, it is hoped that many more people in our community will have thoughtful conversations about their health care decisions and complete reliable advance directives to make their wishes known.

Fewer families and health care providers will have to struggle with making difficult health care decisions in the absence of guidance from the patient, and health care providers and facilities will be better equipped to address advance health care planning issues before a crisis and be better able to honor patient wishes when the time comes to do so.

Madeleine McNielly is director of the Attleboro Council on Aging.

Audience provided by Nielsen/NetRatings

Highlights: HopeHealth