



## PLANNING FOR HEALTH EMERGENCIES

By the AHA Member Services Committee

The idea of preparing for an emergency may seem odd, but about 80 percent of hospital admissions for individuals over 65 are for emergencies. Planning ahead can help individuals, their families and the emergency medical personnel who will treat them.

Here are some suggestions to make health emergencies a bit less stressful:

- Keep an up-to-date medication list (including over-the-counter medications, herbal meds and supplements, vitamins and minerals, ointments and eye drops).
- Maintain a current list of contacts including your doctors, as well as a brief health history.
- Keep a copy of these documents in your wallet or purse, and another copy readily available in your home. Many people keep this information in an envelope on the refrigerator. The File of Life is a form that can be filled out with emergency information and comes with a magnetized envelope used for this purpose. It can be obtained through Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department at any of their fire stations. There are also some available in the AHA office, courtesy of the Alexandria Sheriff's Office.
- Enroll in Smart 911 to record your emergency information in the 911 system. It can be set up through the website [www.alexandriava.gov/911](http://www.alexandriava.gov/911)
- Call AHA if you need help to obtain a File of Life packet or to set up Smart 911. (This is a service we offer our members.)



- Consider using an application (app) on your cell phone where your personal medical information may be stored.
- Consider setting up an emergency call or alert system that can be worn as a necklace or bracelet. These are called PERS (for Personal Emergency Response Systems). A number of companies that do this are advertised in the AARP magazine. AHA can also assist with this.
- Consider complete a living will and a power of attorney for health care. A living will states your wishes regarding health care choices if you are unable to speak for yourself. A power of attorney for health care allows you to appoint an individual to make decisions on your behalf should you be unable to do so yourself. A durable power of attorney takes effect only when you cannot make decisions personally. Together these documents are considered “advance directives,” and are your opportunity to guide your agent and health care providers on the care you want if you are unable to communicate your preferences. Keep these documents safe and easily retrievable. Hospitals will want a copy of your POA in order to speak to your agent.
- Discuss with your power of attorney for health care your wishes for care if you are unable to communicate, including DNR status, organ donation, and what you believe an acceptable quality of life would be for you. You may wish to revisit these issues periodically, as preferences sometimes change over time.
- Anticipate that the hospital may ask you to sign electronic documents before treatments. Make sure that copies are provided to you before you are discharged.