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Patientenverfügung — Planning Ahead for Medical Emergencies

What a Patientenverfügung is, why it matters, and how to document your medical wishes in advance.

Deutsche Begriffe: Patientenverfügung | Vorsorgevollmacht | Betreuungsverfügung | Notfallausweis | Selbstbestimmung

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What is a Patientenverfügung?

A **Patientenverfügung** is a document in which you specify which **medical measures** you wish to receive or refuse — in case you **can no longer decide for yourself** (e.g., in case of serious illness, accident, unconsciousness, dementia).

Since 2009, the Patientenverfügung has been **legally regulated** (§ 1827 BGB) and is **binding** for doctors and guardians.

Why is it important?

Without a Patientenverfügung, **doctors and guardians** make decisions about your treatment — and not always as you would wish. Typical conflict situations:

- **Life-sustaining measures** — ventilators, artificial nutrition
- **Resuscitation** — after cardiac arrest
- **Intensive care medicine** — in severe illness with no prospect of improvement
- **Organ transplantation** — organ donation after death

What precautionary measures are available?

There are **three important documents** that go together:

1. Patientenverfügung

• Regulates **medical measures** (treatment wishes and refusals)

• Only applies if you **can no longer decide for yourself**

• Must be **in writing** (handwritten or printed + signature)

• **No notary required** — but medical consultation recommended

2. Vorsorgevollmacht

• Appoints a **trusted person** to make decisions for you when you cannot

• Covers: **health, finances, authorities, housing**

• Without a Vorsorgevollmacht, the **court appoints a guardian** — could be a stranger!

• Recommendation: **Notarial certification** (often required for real estate and bank transactions)

3. Betreuungsverfügung

• Specifies **whom the court** should appoint as guardian if no authorized representative exists

• You can also specify whom you **do not want** as guardian

What should be in the Patientenverfügung?

Medical situations

Describe **specifically** the situations for which your Patientenverfügung should apply:

• **Terminal stage of an incurable disease** (e.g., end-stage cancer)

• **Permanent loss of decision-making capacity** (e.g., advanced dementia, persistent vegetative state)

• **Acute medical emergency** (e.g., cardiac arrest, severe accident)

• **Brain damage** with permanent unconsciousness

Treatment wishes

For each situation, specify whether you **wish or refuse** the following measures:

Measure	Example
Resuscitation	Chest compressions, defibrillation
Artificial ventilation	Ventilator in intensive care
Artificial nutrition	Feeding tube, infusions
Dialysis	Artificial kidney dialysis
Antibiotics	For pneumonia in terminal stage
Blood transfusion	In case of severe blood loss
Pain management	Even if it could shorten life (palliative care)
Organ donation	After determination of brain death

Personal values

Describe your **personal values** so doctors and guardians better understand your wishes:

- What does **quality of life** mean to you?
- When would a life no longer be **worth living** for you?
- What role do **religious or cultural beliefs** play?
- Do you have **fears** about certain measures?

How do I create a Patientenverfügung?

Step 1 — Get informed

- **Federal Ministry of Justice** (bmj.de) — free brochure and text templates
- **Consumer centers** — guides and forms
- **Medical consultation** — your family doctor can explain medical aspects

Step 2 — Draft the document

- Use **text templates** (BMJ brochure) or seek advice
- Formulate **specifically** (not: "I don't want pointless treatment")
- Describe **situations** and desired/refused measures

Step 3 — Sign

- **Date** and **signature** are required

• Notarial certification is not necessary (but possible)

• **Doctor's countersignature** recommended (confirms capacity to consent)

Step 4 — Store and inform

• Keep **original** at home (easily accessible!)

• **Copies** to: authorized representative, family doctor, close persons

• **Information card** to carry in wallet (location of Patientenverfügung)

• **Central Advance Directive Registry** — registration with Federal Notary Chamber (zvr-online.de, fee: 13–20 €) — courts and hospitals can check there

Step 5 — Review regularly

• Review the Patientenverfügung every **2–3 years**

• **New signature** with date — confirms you stand by your wishes

• When **life circumstances change** (e.g., serious illness, divorce), update accordingly

Costs

Service	Cost
Creating Patientenverfügung yourself	**Free** (BMJ templates)
Medical consultation	**€0–50** (many doctors advise free of charge)
Notarial certification	**€60–100**
Registry (online)	**€13–20** (one-time)
Consumer center (consultation + form)	**€10–30**

Validity

• **No expiration date** — the Patientenverfügung remains valid until you revoke it

• **Can be revoked anytime** — verbally or in writing, even informally

• **Minors** cannot create a valid Patientenverfügung (only from age 18)

• **Regular confirmation** (new signature + date) strengthens binding effect

Special considerations for foreigners

Does the Patientenverfügung apply abroad?

- A German Patientenverfügung is basically valid **only in Germany**
- In **EU countries** it is often recognized, but not guaranteed
- Recommendation: Create a **bilingual version** (German + your native language)

Religious and cultural aspects

- **Islam:** Life-sustaining measures are often favored, organ donation is controversial
- **Christianity:** Self-determination at end of treatment is accepted
- **Judaism:** Life preservation has high value
- **Buddhism/Hinduism:** Varying views on assisted dying

Important: The Patientenverfügung respects **your** personal decision — regardless of religious rules.

Tips

1. Create it now — don't wait for illness, an accident can happen to anyone

2. Don't forget Vorsorgevollmacht — it's at least as important as the Patientenverfügung

3. Include your trusted person — discuss your wishes openly

4. Consult your family doctor — clarify medical terminology

5. Carry an information card — in your wallet so everything can be found in an emergency