Honoring Choices® MINNESOTA
An initiative of the Twin Cities Medical Society

Advance Care Planning Information: Health Care Agent

Ridgeview MEDICAL CENTER

This was provided by Ridgeview Medical Center. If you need more information or would like to meet with someone please call 952-777-5098. This is a FREE service.

Advance Care Planning
Knowing your voice is heard when making decisions about health care is important. Advance Care Planning is the process of preparing for a time when you may not be able to make your own medical decisions. The best time to make these decisions is when you are able to make your own choices.

Health Care Agent
Discussing and sharing your wishes with your loved ones, health care team and health care agent is important. A health care agent makes health care decisions based on your wishes if you are unable to communicate.

Health Care Directive By writing a Health Care Directive, you can make your voice heard so your wishes are followed. A Health Care Directive is a written plan outlining your values and priorities for your future medical treatment.

Choosing a health care agent

Your health care agent should be someone you know well and trust to follow your wishes about future health care. Ideally, choose 1 health care agent and 1 or 2 backup (alternate) health care agents. A health care agent also is known as *power-of-attorney for health care, substitute decision-maker, proxy* or *surrogate.*

How do I choose the right person?
Before naming a health care agent, talk with this person to be sure he or she would be a good agent for you. The person should be able to answer "Yes" to these questions:

- Are you willing to take on this role and responsibility?
- Do you understand my wishes for future health care?
- Can you make the decisions I would want to make, even if you disagree?
- Can you make important health care decisions under stressful situations?

If the person you are considering to be your health care agent answers "No" to any of these questions, talk about your concerns with the person and find someone else. Keep in mind your health care agent cannot be your doctor or another member of your health care team, unless:

- Your doctor or health care team member is a family member or
- You give reasons for choosing this person in your Health Care Directive

When is my health care agent called on to help?
Your health care team may call on your chosen health care agent to make health care decisions any time you are unable to communicate. Such times may occur with end-of-life care or if you have an accident or severe illness. Your health care agent helps make sure your health care team follows what you specify in your Health Care Directive.

What types of decisions might my health care agent need to make?
A health care agent may need to interpret your wishes to make decisions about:

- Medical care or services, such as tests, medications and surgery
- Stopping treatment
- Reviewing and releasing medical records
- Choosing health professionals and organizations to provide care
- Moving you to another location for care

When you choose your health care agent, share the information on the other side with your agent.

Being chosen as a health care agent

You have been chosen by_____to be a health care agent.

How can I prepare to be a health care agent?

Talk to the person who chose you as an agent while the person is able to make his or her own choices. Understand the person's wishes for future health care. Be sure to talk about medical decisions that may come at the end of life. You may need to talk from time to time to see if his or her choices have changed.

How can I best interpret the person's wishes?

Understand what are general wishes. Sometimes people make general statements about what they would want in certain situations. For example:

- "I want to die with dignity."
- "Don't keep me alive with machines."
- "Just keep me comfortable."

These kinds of statements mean different things to different people. Ask the person who chose you as a health care agent to tell you in detail what he or she means.

Understand what are specific wishes. Some people want their health care agent to follow their stated wishes exactly. Other people want their agent to have leeway in making decisions. Find out what the person who chose you to be his or her health care agent is thinking. Ask:

- "Is following your instructions just as written most important?"
  or
- "Should I consider your instructions along with other information and do what seems best at the time?"

Talk about the wishes. Go with the person to medical appointments when possible. You and the clinician can get to know each other. Ask questions about the person's health condition and choices about his or her care.

Consider talking to other professionals who help people make health care decisions such as:

- Advance care planning facilitators
- Social workers
- Religious and spiritual leaders

Talking about a person's wishes for future health care may be uncomfortable. But the more you understand and clarify what someone wants, the more confident you will feel to honor his or her wishes as a health care agent.

For more information about advance care planning or for help creating a Health Care Directive, contact your health care team or Honoring Choices Minnesota.

HonoringChoices.org

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