

MAKING YOUR HEALTHCARE WISHES KNOWN

Information Card For Healthcare Agents

You have been chosen by _____ to be a healthcare agent. This information is provided in order to give you an understanding of what it means to be a healthcare agent and how you can prepare yourself for this very important role.

WHAT IS A HEALTHCARE AGENT?

A healthcare agent is a person designated to make healthcare decisions for someone else if, at some future time, they are unable to make decisions for themselves. One or more physicians typically determine when a person is unable to make his or her own decisions.

BEING A HEALTHCARE AGENT: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

One of the most important responsibilities of being a healthcare agent will be to communicate with your loved ones and healthcare providers to ensure their loved ones wishes are honored when they are unable to communicate them on their own. **He or she values and trusts you to do the right thing.** This is a very important role and should be taken seriously. Ask questions if you are unclear.

You are ready to be a healthcare agent if you can answer “YES” to the following questions.

- Am I willing to accept this role and responsibility?
- Do I know the person’s wishes for future medical decisions?
- Can I make the decisions they would want me to make, even if I do not agree with them?
- Am I able to make major decisions under stressful situations?

If you answer “NO” to any of these questions, you should talk to the person who has chosen you to be their healthcare agent about your concerns.

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WHAT TYPES OF DECISIONS WOULD YOU MAKE AS A HEALTHCARE AGENT?

- medical care or services, like tests, medicine and surgery
- stopping treatment as indicated by the person's stated instructions or by what is in the person's best interest
- interpreting instructions the person has given to you
- reviewing and releasing medical records if needed
- moving the person to another facility
- determine which health professional(s) and organization(s) provide care

THINGS YOU CAN DO TO PREPARE YOURSELF TO BE A HEALTHCARE AGENT

- Take the time to talk to the person who has chosen you to be their healthcare agent.
- Understand their preferences for future medical care, including medical decisions that may come at the end-of-life.
- Ask the person to help you understand what they mean if they say things like "I want to die with dignity" or "Don't keep me alive if I'm a vegetable" or "Just make me comfortable." These kinds of statements mean different things to everyone and discussing their meaning in detail is very important.
- Some people want their healthcare agent to follow their stated preferences very strictly and others want their agent to have some flexibility in making decisions. You need to ask this question "Is it more important to follow your instructions about future medical treatment strictly as written or am I to take your instructions into consideration with other information and do what seems best at the time?"

QUESTIONS?

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