

# Choosing a Healthcare Agent

---

## Role of a Healthcare Agent

An agent that you select has the authority to make any and all decisions you would make if you were able, including:

- choosing your doctor or other healthcare provider and where you will receive your care
- speaking with your healthcare team about your condition and treatment options
- reviewing your medical record and authorizing its release when needed
- accepting or refusing medical treatments, including artificial nutrition and hydration and CPR
- consenting to tissue and organ donation, authorizing an autopsy and arranging for disposition of the remains after death

You should instruct your agent on these matters so he/she knows how to decide for you. The more you tell your agent, the better he/she will be able to make decisions on your behalf.

## Selecting Your Agent

In choosing an agent, consider if he/she:

- is legally able to serve as your agent (must be 18 years old; may not be a healthcare provider or her/his employee, unless this person is your spouse or close relative)
- will be available when needed
- is willing to speak on your behalf
- knows you well and understands your values and beliefs
- will be comfortable asking questions of your healthcare team, particularly related to issues such as treatment options
- will do his/her best to make the healthcare decisions that you would make (whether or not he/she agrees with you)
- will be able to “stand up” for you, be your advocate and handle conflict with others who might disagree with your wishes
- can make difficult decisions under stress

## Additional Information

- It is helpful to select at least one alternate agent, since your primary agent may be unreachable or unavailable (e.g., involved in a car accident with you).
- Talk with your agent about your wishes and give her/him a copy of your advance directive.
- To avoid confusion, tell your loved ones whom you selected as your agent(s).
- If circumstances change, you may select a new agent at any time. Make sure to give your new agent a copy of the revised advance directive, and tell family and friends of the change.