

How do I fill out a Health Care Proxy?

It is a simple legal form. It has instructions. You do not need a lawyer and you can revoke (cancel) it or change it at any time.

Give *copies* of your Health Care Proxy and of any written advance directives to your Agent, family, and health care providers.

Steps to Choose a Health Care Agent

Take some time to think about whom you might choose for this important role. It does not have to be a spouse or family member; it can be a close friend or advisor. However, it must be someone whom you trust and who knows you and your values well.

Your *Agent* may be asked to decide about tests, surgeries, and treatments, including life or death choices. He or she must be able and willing to take on this role.

To help you choose, ask yourself:

1. Can he or she be available to meet and talk with health care providers as needed?
2. Is he or she able to make difficult decisions under stressful conditions?

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3. Does he or she know my choices for medical treatment in different situations? Is he or she willing to spend time talking with me to find out?
4. Does he or she know me well enough to know what I value in life and what gives my life meaning? Is he or she willing to spend time talking with me to find out?
5. Will he or she make the medical choices I would make for myself?
6. Do I trust that this person will make those choices even if he or she, loved ones, or health care providers disagree?

Talk it over with the person you want to be your Health Care Agent. He or she must be able and willing to accept the role and the responsibilities that come with it. Once he or she agrees, fill out and sign a *Health Care Proxy*.

SUPPORTING YOUR DECISIONS

Whether you have a Health Care Proxy or not, if at any time during your hospital stay a family member, loved one, or health care provider has difficulty respecting your choices, you or your Health Care Agent may request consultation with the MGH Optimum Care (Ethics) Committee. Ask your nurse or call 726-5758.

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Planning in Advance for Your Health Care



MASSACHUSETTS
GENERAL HOSPITAL

Advance Care Planning Task Force
(A sub-group of the Ethics in Clinical Practice Committee)

We have the right to make choices and decisions about our medical care.

Sometimes sudden illness or injury prevents us from making choices and decisions for our medical care. Planning for those times can help make our wishes known and respected. This is *advance care planning*.

The staff of Massachusetts General Hospital encourages every adult to begin this process when healthy, before a crisis.

How can I start this process?

Advance care planning involves thinking about your choices and preferences, talking about them with others and even writing them down.

It can be difficult to think ahead about medical choices and preferences. To begin:

Think about past events.

Have you faced medical choices and decisions for yourself, for your friends or family?

If you have a medical condition,

How well do you understand it and the medical choices you may face in the future?

Think about times when you must make medical choices.

For instance,

- If you are in an accident or become very ill and would never again be aware of who you are or of your surroundings, would you want medical treatments to keep you alive? How do you feel about needing a breathing machine or nursing home care to stay alive?

Think about your beliefs and about what gives your life meaning.

- What do you value most about your life?
- How do your spiritual beliefs guide the medical choices you might make?

Think about someone you might trust to speak or make decisions for you in the event that you are not able to.

- Who knows you and your values well enough to make decisions and speak for you when you cannot?

The person you choose to speak for you about your medical choices when you are not able is your *Health Care Agent*. Read on the next page under **Steps to Choose a Health Care Agent** about choosing and appointing a Health Care Agent.

Talk about your choices

It is important to talk about your choices with others.

Your doctor can help you understand medical choices you might face upon a serious accident or illness.

Your family, friends, clergy or spiritual leaders can help you reflect on your choices.

To help avoid conflict and confusion in the future, tell your loved ones and your health care providers about your preferences. The statements you make to give direction about your health care choices for the future are *advance directives*. You may want to write them down.

Write down your choices

Although it is optional to write down your choices, doing so can help make sure that others know and respect them even when you cannot speak for yourself.

In Massachusetts, you can use a simple legal document called a *Health Care Proxy* to name a Health Care Agent and record your advance directive.

You can get a *Health Care Proxy* form at MGH. Ask your nurse for help or go to, or call, the Blum Patient and Family Learning Center at MGH, (617)724-7352.