

Spotlight On Health Care



Choosing A Health Care Surrogate: Who Speaks For You When You Can't?

(NAPSA)—An accident or severe illness can occur at any time, regardless of your age or condition of health, which is why it's important to discuss your health care preferences with your loved ones as soon as possible. Many people are reluctant to talk about their preferences and are uncomfortable even thinking about them. Putting off these important conversations may result in family conflict and confusion at a time when you are most vulnerable.

One of the first things to do to manage your advance care planning is to select someone you trust as a health care surrogate. This person's role will be to ensure that your health care preferences are communicated if there is ever a time when you are unable to express them yourself. The surrogate you select might not be the obvious choice, so before you decide, consider the following:

- Does this person know you well and can he or she express your values, goals and wishes? You may feel a spouse or family member may not necessarily be the best option for you—perhaps because he or she may be too emotionally involved; or a spouse or family member may be the best choice—only you will know. Make sure your selected health care surrogate understands the types of medical interventions you want—and don't want—under certain circumstances.

- Is your selected health care surrogate able to work effectively with authorities and bureaucracies and advocate for your rights?

- Is he or she likely to be reachable at any time?



Once you have selected a health care surrogate, he or she has the authority to act only if you cannot speak for yourself and must act according to your wishes in a number of ways, including:

- Receiving the same medical information you would receive;
- Asking questions and getting explanations;
- Requesting consultations and second opinions;
- Consenting to or refusing medical tests, medications or treatments, including life-sustaining treatment and/or organ donation, according to your preferences;
- Authorizing admissions or transfers to another physician, organization or institution, including assisted-living facilities, hospitals, hospices and nursing homes;
- Taking any legal action needed to carry out your health care wishes.

It's never too early to start discussing your health care wishes. The peacefulness of your last days depends on the conversations you start today. To find out more about choosing a legally recognized health care surrogate in your state, visit www.caringinfo.org.