

How to Select Your Health Care Agent

When you decide to pick someone to speak for you in a medical crisis, in case you are not able to speak for yourself, there are several things to think about. This checklist will help you decide who the best person is. Usually it is best to name *one* person or agent to serve at a time, with at least one successor, or back-up person, in case the first person is not available when needed.

Compare up to 3 people with this tool. The persons best suited to be your Health Care Agents should rate well on these qualifications...

Name #1:			
Name #3:			
			1. Meets the legal criteria in your state for acting as agent or proxy or representative? (See next page for PA criteria.)
			2. Would be willing to speak on your behalf.
			3. Would be able to act on your wishes and separate his/her own feelings from yours.
			4. Lives close by or could travel to be at your side if needed.
			5. Knows you well and understands what's important to you.
			6. Could handle the responsibility.
			7. Will talk with you now about sensitive issues and will listen to your wishes.
			8. Will likely be available long into the future.
			9. Would be able to handle conflicting opinions between family members, friends, and medical personnel.
			10. Can be a strong advocate in the face of an unresponsive doctor or institution.

The person you choose to make health care decisions for you is known by different names in different states. In Pennsylvania this person is called a health care agent, but may also be referred to as your proxy, representative, attorney-in-fact, surrogate, or even patient advocate.

WHO CAN'T BE YOUR HEALTH CARE AGENT?

Unless related to you by blood, marriage or adoption, your health care agent may not be any of the following:

- ▶ Your attending physician or other health care provider.
- ▶ An owner, operator or employee of a health care provider in which you are receiving care.

WHAT TO DO AFTER YOU PICK A HEALTH CARE PROXY?

- ▶ Talk to your agent about the qualifications on the first page of this worksheet.
- ▶ Ask permission to name him or her as your agent.
- ▶ Discuss your health care wishes and values and fears.
- ▶ Make sure your proxy gets an original copy of your advance directive.
- ▶ Tell family members and close friends who you picked.

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This worksheet adapted from the American Bar Association's Lawyer's Toolkit for Health Care Advance Planning and R. Pearlman, et. al., *Your Life Your Choices – Planning for Future Medical Decisions:*

How to Prepare a Personalized Living Will, Veterans Administration Medical Center, Seattle, Washington.