

Health Care Surrogate Guide



A program of Community Hospice & Palliative Care
in collaboration with Northeast Florida hospitals

What is a Health Care Surrogate?

A Health Care Surrogate is an adult who has been named to be the medical decision maker for an individual in the event that person is unable to speak for themselves when decisions need to be made. In the state of Florida a physician must be the one to determine that someone is not capable of making their own medical decisions. About 50% of the population will be unable to speak for themselves and make health care decisions at some point in their lives.

What does it mean to be a Health Care Surrogate?

Being a health care surrogate is a very important role. It means that someone has entrusted you to make their decisions and honor their choices if they are ever determined by a doctor to be unable to do so for themselves. The expectation is that you will make decisions that the person would have made for themselves, were they able, even if you do not personally agree with them. Talk with the person you are representing to ensure that you understand their wishes for future health care issues. You may need to talk from time to time to see if his or her choices have changed.

What kinds of decisions might need to be made?

There is no way to predict what decisions might have to be made for someone but some of the more common ones include:

- Picking where and from whom the person will get medical care
- Speaking with the health care team about the individual's condition and treatment options
- Allowing or refusing medicines and/or laboratory tests to be administered
- Agreeing to or refusing surgery or other treatments including CPR and artificial nutrition and hydration
- Deciding to stop treatments or life support measures in keeping with the person's wishes
- Deciding who is allowed access to the person's medical record

Am I the right one to do this?

We advise potential health care surrogates to ask themselves these questions:

- Am I willing to be a health care surrogate?
- Am I willing to find out as much as I can about their wishes, goals, and beliefs about medical care, especially end of life medical care?
- Can I follow their choices and wishes even if I don't agree with them and/or stand up against others who might disagree?
- Can I make difficult decisions under stressful and emotional circumstances?

What else do I need to know?

- Get a copy of the most recent advance care planning document which names you as surrogate
- Have a conversation with the individual and ask these questions, having the person provide detailed responses:
 - What's important to you to "live well?"
 - What brings you joy in life?
 - What does quality of life mean for you?
 - What experiences and beliefs have influenced your decisions?

Having these kinds of discussions with the individual will help you be as confident as possible, should the time come for you to carry out their wishes. It will also help to decrease the likelihood of conflict among loved ones.

If you would like help engaging in the conversation, or if you have questions, trained facilitators are available free through Honoring Choices Florida . Contact us through the website or phone number below.