

Health Care Agent: What You Need to Know

A health care agent makes health care decisions for someone who can no longer make their own. All adults should have a health care agent in case of sudden accident, illness or injury. Choose an agent **before** a crisis.

When does a health care agent start to make choices?

An agent makes choices **only** if the person is not able to. In most states, a doctor defines when patients cannot decide for themselves.

What are some of the decisions a health care agent may have to make?

A health care agent makes decisions based upon the person's goals, values and preferences. The health care agent speaks on behalf of a person unable to tell medical staff what he or she wants. An agent may:

- Decide on tests, surgery and medicine.
- Choose the patient's doctor(s).
- Choose the location(s) where the person may receive care.
- Decide to stop treatment.
- Decide whether to share the patient's medical records.

How do I choose a health care agent?

A health care agent is someone you trust to make decisions on your behalf. He or she should be able to answer "Yes" to these questions:

- Am I willing to be a healthcare agent?
- Have I spoken to the person asking me to be an agent about his or her goals, values and preferences?
- Can I follow the preferences he or she has explained to me whether or not I agree with them?
- Could I make difficult health care decisions even when I feel stressed and upset?

How do I prepare my health care agent?

Taking time to talk about your goals and values is the best way. To prepare an agent for the role you should think and talk about your answers to the following questions:

- “What is important to live well?”
- “What does quality of life mean to you?”
- “When would life not be worth living?”
- “When would you want doctors to stop treatments that keep you alive? How sick would you be? What could you no longer do?”
- “How would you describe a peaceful death?”

For more information

Do you have questions about choosing and asking a health care agent? Has someone asked you to be their agent? Would you like to meet with one of our advance care planning facilitators? Ask any Gundersen staff member, send a message through MyCare or call:

Advance Care Planning

(608) 775-6000 or (800) 362-9567, ext. 56000

Or visit gundersenhealth.org/advance-care

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