

ADVANCE CARE TOOLS

Part 1 of this series focused on the need to talk to family and friends about your personal, spiritual and ethical views about health care decisions. We need to plan who will be our voice and make health care decisions for us if we cannot speak for ourselves. An **Advance Directive** is a written document which you complete while you are healthy. It states how you want medical decisions to be made. The two common forms are a living will and a health care proxy (or Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care). In Massachusetts, a **health care proxy is the only legally recognized advance directive.** [MGL Ch 201D]

A health care proxy is a legal document which allows you to name someone (a health care agent) to make medical decisions when you cannot make them for yourself. This happens only when your physician determines in writing that you cannot make or communicate health care decisions for yourself.

You can name any competent adult to be your health care agent as long as the person is not an employee of a health care facility where you reside at the time you complete the proxy, unless the employee is your relative. You may name an alternate to serve in the event your health care agent is not available. You do not need to have the health care proxy notarized but your signature must be witnessed by two (2) people (other than your agent or alternate).

Once you have completed a health care proxy form, you should keep the original in a safe place and make copies for your health care agent and alternate and your physician(s). [A photocopy is as acceptable as the original.] You may also want to give a copy to your lawyer, clergy person or other family members. You should bring a copy with you when you go to the hospital. Hospitals and other health care facilities must offer you a chance to complete a health care proxy and must inquire if you have one.

You can revoke your health care proxy, at any time, by signing a new one; notifying your physician or agent orally or in writing; or doing something to show you want to revoke it (ex. tear it up).

Health Care Proxy forms can be downloaded from the internet: www.massmed.org , click on Health Care Proxy. You can also obtain forms from social services at the Newton Senior Center – please call ahead and schedule a pick up time.

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