

PATIENT ADVOCATE FACTS • WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

A patient advocate is a person chosen by a loved one, family member or friend to make health care decisions, including end-of-life decisions, in the event a person is unable to make his or her own decisions. In Michigan, two physicians or a doctor and a psychologist, determine if a person is unable to make his or her own decisions.

What is a patient advocate?

Being a patient advocate means you may need to make health care decisions for someone who cannot think or speak for himself or herself. This is a very important role. Ask questions if you are unclear about your responsibilities as a patient advocate.

The person who has chosen you is expecting that you will make the decisions that he or she would make if able. He or she values and trusts you to follow their wishes.

You should be able to answer “YES” to the following questions:

- Am I willing to take this role and responsibility?
- Do I know what the person would want for future medical care?
- Can I make the decisions they would want me to make, even if I disagree with the decisions?
- Am I able to make difficult medical decisions under stressful situations?

If you answer “NO” to any of these questions, you should talk about your concerns with the person who chose you.

As a patient advocate, you may need to make decisions about:

- Medical care and services, such as tests, medicine and surgery.
- Discontinuing treatment based on the person’s instructions or what is in the person’s best interest.
- Releasing medical records.
- Which organization and health care professional should provide care.

Preparing for your role as patient advocate:

Take time to talk with the person who chose you as their patient advocate so you understand their preferences for future medical care, including the end-of-life care.

Have a conversation with your family or friend by learning:

“What is important to you to live well?”

“When would life not be worth living?”

“When would you want doctors to stop treatments that keep you alive?”

“How would you describe a peaceful death?”

The following statements often mean different things to different people. Ask the person who chose you as their patient advocate to explain what each one means to him or her. This is very important. **Write down the answers and read them back to make sure you both have a clear understanding.**

“I just want to die with dignity.”

“Don’t keep me alive if I’m a vegetable.”

“Just make me comfortable.”

Some people want their patient advocate to follow their stated preferences strictly and others want their agent to be free to decide based on what seems to be the best decision at the time.

Remember: *While talking about these issues with a loved one may be uncomfortable, the more you understand the better prepared you will be if you are called on to make health care decisions for your loved one. Think about being prepared as an act of love. If you accept the role of health care agent, commit to it. Trust yourself to do what is right. The person who chose you trusts that you can – and will.*

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To speak with a certified facilitator, request an advance care planning speaker or learn more about volunteer opportunities, **please contact us:**



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