

INFORMATION CARD

for Health Care Agent

_____ has chosen you to be a health care agent. This sheet tells you what it means to be a health care agent is and provides other information you need to know.

What is a health care agent?

Being a health care agent means you will be called on to make medical choices for someone who cannot think or speak for himself or herself. The person is sick, sometimes at the end of life. In California, a doctor defines when a person is no longer able to make decisions for himself or herself.

What does it mean to be a health care agent?

When you have been asked to be a health care agent, it means the person trusts you. Being a health care agent is a very important role. Be sure to ask questions if you do not understand what it means. Your loved one or friend expects you to decide what to do based on what the person would do if he or she could tell you. You should be able to answer “Yes” to all of these questions:

- Am I willing to be a health care agent?
- Have I talked to the person about his or her future health care wishes?
- Can I make the choices the person has indicated even if I feel stressed and upset?
- Am I able to make difficult medical decisions even if I feel stressed and upset?

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

What are some things I might have to do as a health care agent?

- Think about what your loved one has told you or written down.
- Make decisions about tests to be done.
- Make decisions about medication that may be offered.
- Allow or not allow surgery offered by doctors.
- Choose to stop or change treatment based on what your loved one told you or what you think is best.
- Decide who should be allowed to read your loved one’s medical records.
- Decide to let your loved one be moved to get care in another place.
- Pick what doctor should care for your loved one and where he or she should get care.
- Decide whether or not to let your loved one be given a research drug that is still being tested.

How can I prepare to be a health care agent?

Take time to talk to the person who chose you. These are some questions you need answers to before you can accept this role.

- “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 sick would you be?”
- “What does quality of life mean to you?”
- “How would you describe a peaceful death?”

The following phrases mean different things to different people. Ask the friend or loved one who chose you to explain what each one means to him or her. This is very important. Write down what your friend or loved one says. Read it back to make sure you both understand.

- “I want to die with dignity.”
- “I wish to stay alive as long as possible.”
- “Life is the most important thing to me.”
- “I want to die a peaceful death.”
- “I would not want to live in pain.”
- “Please do not let the doctor keep me alive on a machine.”
- “Just let me pass.”

Some people want their health care agent to do exactly what they have said or written. Others want their health care agent to be free to decide based on how things are going. Find out what your loved one or friend wants. Ask this question:

- “Should I follow what you said you want, no matter what? Or should I do what seems best at the time?”

Some doctors, nurses, social workers, chaplains, and others are trained to help people plan for future health care. They can also help you learn more about being a health care agent.

It is not easy to talk about making health care decisions for your loved one or friend. You may agree to become a health care agent yet hope you are never called on to fulfill your duties.

Many people just like you have told us that being prepared is the best way. Think about being prepared as an act of love. If you accept this role, commit to it. Trust yourself to do what is right. The person who chose you trusts that you can – and will.

For more information you can go to kp.org/lifecareplan or contact your local Kaiser Permanente Healthy Living Center.

© Copyright 2008—All rights reserved. Gunderson Lutheran Medical Foundation, Inc. Used under license from Gunderson Lutheran Medical Foundation, Inc.