

Choosing a Healthcare Agent

Role of a Healthcare Agent

An agent that you select has the authority to make any and all decisions you would make if you were able, including:

- choosing your doctor or other healthcare provider and where you will receive your care
- speaking with your healthcare team about your condition and treatment options
- reviewing your medical record and authorizing its release when needed
- accepting or refusing medical treatments, including artificial nutrition and hydration and CPR
- consenting to tissue and organ donation, authorizing an autopsy and arranging for disposition of the remains after death

You should instruct your agent on these matters so he/she knows how to decide for you. The more you tell your agent, the better he/she will be able to make decisions on your behalf.

Selecting Your Agent

In choosing an agent, consider if he/she:

- is legally able to serve as your agent (In Colorado an agent must be 18 years old)
- will be available when needed
- is willing to speak on your behalf
- knows you well and understands your values and beliefs
- will be comfortable asking questions of your healthcare team, particularly related to issues such as treatment options
- will do his/her best to make the healthcare decisions that you would make (whether or not he/she agrees with you)
- will be able to “stand up” for you, be your advocate and handle conflict with others who might disagree with your wishes
- can make difficult decisions under stress

Additional Information

- It is helpful to select at least one alternate agent, since your primary agent may be unreachable or unavailable (e.g., involved in a car accident with you).
- Talk with your agent about your wishes and give her/him a copy of your advance directive.
- To avoid confusion, tell your loved ones whom you selected as your agent(s).
- If circumstances change, you may select a new agent at any time. Make sure to give your new agent a copy of the revised advance directive, and tell family and friends of the change.

This material is for educational purposes only with credit to the Center for Healthcare Decisions and Coalition for Compassionate Care of California