

Information Card for Patient Advocates

You have been chosen by _____ to be a patient advocate. This information is provided so that you understand what it means to be a patient advocate and how you can prepare yourself for this important role.

What is a patient advocate?

A patient advocate is a person chosen by a loved one, family or friend to make healthcare decisions, including end-of-life decisions, at any time this person is unable to make his or her own decisions. Typically, one or more physicians will determine when a person is unable to make his or her own decisions.

What does it mean to be a patient advocate?

This is a very important role you should take seriously and ask questions if you are unclear.

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 do the right thing.

It means that you should be able to answer “Yes” to the following questions:

Am I willing to take this role and responsibility?

Do I know the person’s wishes for future medical decisions?

Can I make the decisions they would want me to make, even if I disagree with them?

Am I able to make major medical decisions under stressful situations?

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

What types of decisions would you make as a patient advocate?

...about medical care or services, like tests, medicine and surgery

...about stopping treatment as indicated by the person’s stated instructions or by what is in the person’s best interest

...about interpreting instructions the person has given you

...about reviewing and releasing medical records if needed

...about moving the person to another facility

...about which health professional and organizations provide care

Things you can do to prepare yourself to be a patient advocate

Take time to talk to the person who has chosen you and understand their preferences for future medical care, including medical decisions that may come at the end-of-life.

Ask the person to help you understand what they mean if they say things like “I just want to die with dignity” or “Don’t keep me alive if I’m a vegetable” or “Just make me comfortable”. These kinds of statements often mean different things to different people and discussing their meaning in detail is very important.

Some people want their patient advocate to follow their stated preferences strictly and others want their agent to have more leeway in making decisions. To find out how much leeway you are to have, ask the person: “Is it more important to follow your instructions about your future medical treatment strictly as written or am I to take your instructions into consideration with other information and do what seems best at the time?”

Try to go with the person to a doctor’s appointment. You and the doctor can get to know each other and you can ask questions regarding the person’s health condition and choices they make about their care.

You may want to talk to other professionals who specialize in helping people make future medical decisions. They include advance care planning facilitators, social workers and clergy among others.

Remember: While talking about these issues may be uncomfortable, the more you understand, the better patient advocate you will be. Your efforts and concern are truly an act of love.

For additional information on advance care planning, or to schedule an appointment with a certified advance care planning facilitator to assist you in reviewing and completing your advance directive document, please contact one of the organizations below:



(810) 232-2228
YHYC@flint.org



(810) 424-2270
YHYC@genesys.org



(810) 262-2770
YHYC@hurleymc.com



(810) 342-2546
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