



Who will speak for me if I cannot speak for myself?

Health Care Power of Attorney (HCPOA)

Life can change **quickly**. Conversations we thought we would have time for often go **unspoken**. We can maintain control if we **plan ahead**, think about our **goals and values** around our healthcare and **treatment options**, and communicate and document these wishes.

Choosing someone who can **communicate** your healthcare wishes to your medical providers can ensure that even if you are not able make healthcare decisions directly, there is someone who can be your **voice for decisions**. It is difficult to plan for all situations, but talking through even some likelihoods will allow you to let your loved ones better understand your directions.

What is a health care power of attorney (HCPOA)?

An HCPOA is someone who has been appointed by you and recorded on a document. This individual can then make medical decisions if you can no longer make those decisions for yourself. Unless the document includes specific limits, the agent will have broad authority to make any healthcare decision you could normally make for yourself.

What steps or considerations should I take before choosing a health care power of attorney?

- If you have any present health conditions, discuss with your physician what future medical complications could occur and what treatment options would be available to you.
- Consider what role, if any, your religion or faith plays in your healthcare choices.
- Consider what is most important to you, regarding medical treatment, medical care that will prolong my life or comfort measures. Would a serious, permanent injury to your brain change the course of treatment for you?
- Reflect on your thoughts on organ donation.

I have a big family. Who should I choose to be my health care power of attorney?

Except for certain state guidelines that may limit you choosing your direct healthcare provider, your choice for HCPOA is up to you. The individual does not have to be related, but should be someone who:

- You can trust and is accessible to your healthcare team (the individual does not have to live in the same state).
- Is willing to accept the responsibility. If someone does not accept, this is not a reflection on your relationship; instead, the person may feel he/she does not have the emotional ability to direct your care during a time of crisis or the ability to be accessible to your healthcare team.
- Understands your healthcare wishes and values and can honor and communicate them even if they do not reflect their own choices.
- It is advisable to appoint one HCPOA and then to choose alternates if this person is not able to step in at the time needed. Appointing multiple HCPOAs to make the decisions together, such as all your adult children, requires that they all agree (majority), which may be difficult during a stressful event.

After completing the health care power of attorney paperwork, what should I do next?

- Communicate. It is important that not only the HCPOA understands the paperwork has been completed and that person has a copy of the document(s), but that any other family member or involved persons understand the decision that has been made and know who to turn to when needed.
- Discuss your specific choices with your HCPOA and confirm that he/she understands your wishes.
- Keep it current. Health conditions change and family structures can as well. This is a document that can be changed, voided or revoked at any time and should at all times reflect your wishes based on the healthcare information you have at the time.

For more information, visit AZHDR.org.