

## *My dear friend,*

I'm leaving this brochure for you because I'd like to talk with you. But I wanted you to have a chance to think about something first.

I'd like you to be the person to make health care decisions for me in case something happens and I can't do that myself. Don't worry! As far as I know, I'm pretty healthy. But I sometimes worry that if I was injured in a car accident, or had a heart attack, or had to have a serious surgery, that *somebody* know what my choices would be. I want you to be that person.

In Massachusetts, we have a simple legal document called a Health Care Proxy. It lets me name anyone I choose to make health care decisions for me in case I can't. We don't need a lawyer to fill it out. It doesn't have to be notarized. And it doesn't cost anything! Actually, I got two copies from my doctor's office. (Or was it at the hospital? Or through our health plan. I can't remember.) Anyway, I can fill out this simple form that names you as my Agent, and sign it in front of two witnesses—anybody except you. It also has a space for your phone number and e-mail address so that somebody would know how to get hold of you if they had to.

That's all there is to it! I keep the original. But I make some copies and give them to

you, my doctor, the health plan, and anyone else who might be interested in my health care if something happened.

Why do I want to do this? Let me count the reasons! First, I want to make very sure that my wishes are respected—by you and everyone else. I know that might be a little selfish, but it's how I feel. Second, and almost as important, I know that you'll be involved with my care and you'll probably be worried and maybe upset. And because we haven't talked about such things in the past, I think you'll wonder what I would want. I know you will want to do what's best for me. But we've never really talked about what either us think would be “best” for ourselves.

That's what I'd like to talk about with you. If I become ill or injured and can't make my own decisions, I want you to do that for me. But I want you to have some guidelines to go by. I have very strong feelings about you, me, us, and what might happen to me in the future. I've thought about what I'd want if I was terribly injured and might not recover fully. I've thought a little about what it might be like to have a permanent physical or mental disability. I also know which pajamas I'd want to wear in the hospital. I want you to know some of these so that if a nurse or doctor asks you what I'd want, you could tell them.

What would you have to do? I hope nothing. But if something happened and I couldn't speak for myself, my doctor would call you. You would have the full legal authority to make any and all of my health care decisions. About my physical health and my mental health. You could say “yes” or “no” to any treatment that my doctor recommended. You could see my medical record, talk with my doctor and other people on the health care team. You could even decide about my care at the end of life.

I know you're saying, “But I'd do this anyway!” But that's just the point. Sometimes there are serious disagreements about a person's care. The person's spouse or family think one way. The doctor thinks another way. I don't want you to be in the middle of a big argument when I'm sick and need your help, love, and care. If I name you in my Health Care Proxy, you become my *only* decision maker, at least for health care. My doctor. The hospital. The health plan. They'd all have to listen to you because I named you to do that. You might even have to go to court if they didn't agree to do what you knew I wanted.

I know this could be a big job. But I hope it won't. I just think it's better to plan ahead about these things. I hope you'll say yes, but I'll understand if you want more time to think about it.

Check the box below and let me know what you're thinking.

I'll be your agent. Let's make a date to talk!

I need more time to think about this. I'll let you know in a few days.

Thank you for the letter. I don't think we've been introduced. My name is \_\_\_\_\_

PS. Do you want me to be *your* Agent?

At *Massachusetts Health Decisions*, we would very much like to know how we might make this draft brochure better. We'd welcome your thoughts and suggestions at any time. Please e-mail us at: [proxy@masshealthdecisions.org](mailto:proxy@masshealthdecisions.org)

*Massachusetts Health Decisions* is a non-profit program that has provided public and professional education on ethical issues in health care since 1988. We distribute the Health Care Proxy in English and fifteen other languages, including Braille and American Sign Language, as well as educational materials on health care decision making. MHD is supported by charitable contributions, sale of Health Care Proxy materials, and program fees from its non-partisan educational programs, seminars, and conferences.

*My Dear Friend. . . .*