



The Medical Society of the State of New York



Know Your Choices - Share Your Wishes

By Michael Rosenberg, M.D. and Patricia Bomba, M.D.

Benjamin Franklin once said only two things are certain — death and taxes. This week it's hoped that each of those certainties is discussed.

Yesterday was tax filing day. Today is National Healthcare Decisions Day.

Today you're encouraged to initiate an ongoing conversation with loved ones and your physician about your health care preferences, and also select a spokesperson (proxy) to make medical decisions on your behalf in case you can't make them for yourself. These steps are part of "advance care planning."

The Medical Society of the State of New York, Excellus BlueCross BlueShield and more than 100 other collaborators have championed National Healthcare Decisions Day to pursue three goals.

First: To get everyone to select a spokesperson and complete a Health Care Proxy form. Copies should be provided to loved ones and your physician.

Second: To increase awareness of MOLST (Medical Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment).

The MOLST form is a bright pink document that patients with advanced chronic illness and frailty complete with their doctor. The form then stays with them so end-of-life preferences will be followed as they move through the health care system — facility to facility, physician to physician.

Third: To ensure passage this year of the Family Health Care Decisions Act. This proposed legislation is so sensible that most New Yorkers might assume such a law exists. It would expand the authority of family members and others close to the patient to decide about treatment — including life-sustaining treatment — for loved ones who can no longer decide for themselves and do not have a health care proxy.

Most people are shocked to learn that currently they do not have the power to make health care decisions for their next of kin.

The proposed law would also provide the most comprehensive policies in the nation for patients who do not have family or friends who are able or willing to decide about treatment on their behalf. Many patient safeguards are built into the proposal.

The State Medical Society and Excellus BlueCross BlueShield also have selected today to launch a public awareness campaign to encourage people to learn more about advance care planning.

Public service announcements have been provided to television outlets across upstate New York. They direct viewers to www.CompassionAndSupport.org, a community-based Web site where they can see videos, read about practical issues to consider, find guidelines for choosing a spokesperson, and download Health Care Proxy and MOLST forms and a free planning booklet that describes Five Easy Steps to follow.

It is hoped that National Healthcare Decisions Day and the public service campaign will prompt people to learn more about advance care planning, and to take the steps necessary to provide themselves, and their loved ones, with peace of mind.

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