

Daily Camera Article – April 2017
Help family make best health care decisions on your behalf
By Phyllis Coletta – for the Grillo Health Information Center

Q. A dear friend died last year after suffering from dementia and cancer. Her children disagreed about every healthcare decision. How can I avoid my family being torn apart if I'm too ill to say what I want?

A. In the state of Colorado, if you are unable to make your own healthcare decisions, the law allows any “interested party” to show up and ask to be your proxy decision-maker. The good news is that you can easily address this issue right now and help your family by leaving them a map, not a mess. It takes some deliberate family conversations around your values, hopes, and fears and the appointment of one person (and two alternates) with the qualities of an advocate to be your voice.

A healthcare agent – also known as a healthcare proxy or surrogate – is someone you choose to make healthcare decisions for you when you cannot. A healthcare agent should be someone who:

- * Knows you well
- * Is calm in a crisis
- * Understands how you would make the decision if you were able
- * Is not afraid to ask questions and advocate to doctors
- * Can reassure and communicate with your family

The American Bar Association's Commission on Law and Aging has a helpful tool for selecting a healthcare agent on its website (www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/law_aging/tool1.authcheckdam.pdf).

Physicians are entering into the discussion, with many making a conscious effort to learn more about how to help patients with Advance Care Planning – the ongoing process of communication about future medical decisions. While some documentation is helpful, and a Medical Durable Power of Attorney is indispensable, research supports the fact that a well-informed, unified family is the most important factor for good healthcare decision-making.

This year, National Healthcare Decisions Week is April 17-22 (death and taxes all at one time!). The Conversation Project in Boulder, Longmont United Hospital and Practically Dying have put together a host of fun, informative events to help you think about future healthcare decisions. A calendar of Boulder County events can be found at www.theconversationprojectinboulder.org/national-healthcare-decisions-week-2017/.

Advance Care Planning is for everyone over 18; it is surely not a topic just for senior citizens. Rather, it's a crucial part of good and regular healthcare – not unlike checking vital signs or routine blood tests.

As Ellen Goodman, founder of The Conversation Project, says, “It's never too early, until it's too late.”

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*Phyllis Coletta, Director of the Conversation Project in Boulder, provided this month's article for the **Grillo Center**, which offers free, confidential research to assist in health understanding and decisions. **To use this service, contact us at www.grillocenter.org, 720-854-7293 or 4715 Arapahoe Ave, Boulder.** No research or assistance should be interpreted as medical advice. We encourage informed consultation with your health care provider.*

Where to Find It:

MedlinePlus (<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000469.htm>)

Google: medlineplus health care agents

National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization

(<http://www.caringinfo.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3286>)

Google: caringinfo healthcare agents

The Conversation Project in Boulder County (<http://theconversationprojectinboulder.org>)

Google: conversation boulder