

## Navigating Health Events for Unmarried Same-Sex Couples



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No one wants to think about a time when you might need hospital services, but the reality is that about 10% of people aged 65 years or older will have at least one hospital admission a year. This time is always stressful, but more so when you are worried about stigma and possible barriers to navigating the health system for your same-sex unmarried partner. Here are some strategies that can help:

Planning ahead gives you the chance to consider how you can best position yourself to advocate for the healthcare needs of your partner and alleviate future, unnecessary stress.

1. Complete a Massachusetts Health Care Proxy form and know where it is when you need it.

The Health Care Proxy form allows you to designate an individual (known as your “agent”) to express your wishes for treatment or to make unforeseen Health Care decisions for you if you are unable to do so. Before designating your agent, you should discuss your values and treatment preferences in detail with that person.

To make informed decisions for you, that person is entitled, by law, to all information about your condition. With your physician, that person will make decisions about your treatment until you can make decisions for yourself. The hospital is obligated to carry out the decisions of your agent to the same extent that it would if you could make them yourself.

If you have not appointed an agent to act for you, your physician will most likely consult with your next of kin. The next of kin, however, is not automatically the legal spokesperson for a patient. Further, in large families there is often disagreement about critical treatment decisions. That is why it is so important that you decide before you become ill who will speak for you and that you formalize that choice by signing a Health Care Proxy.

Forms for the Health Care Proxy are available from the Mount Auburn Hospital physicians, chaplain, social workers, physician assistants or from your nurse. You should send copies of the signed documents to your physician and to the Mount Auburn Hospital Medical Records Department for your permanent medical record. If you sign the document while you are a patient in the hospital, the person assisting you in that process will see that it is included in your chart.

## 2. Patient Representative

We encourage you to designate a Health Care Proxy. In addition, you may designate a Health Care Proxy or another individual to act as your patient representative who would assist you with making medical decisions. If designated, we will work with your patient representative for the duration of this admission/visit, and will involve him/her in discussions about care planning, informed consent, pain management and discharge planning at your request. You may designate a patient representative orally or in writing to a member of your care team.

The Patient Representative is different from a Health Care Proxy because a Health Care Proxy becomes active only after you have become unable to make your own medical decisions.

A Patient Representative is someone you designate to make medical decisions on your behalf even though you are able to make your own medical decisions.

## 3. When Registering:

A patient is asked a number of questions during registration, including whether the patient wishes to designate next of kin, a person to notify when they are admitted (primary contact), a patient representative and/or Health Care Proxy agent. You will also be asked upon registration whether you want your contact notified of your admission.

Affirm at registration who you want each of these roles to be. If you have a Health Care Proxy form, provide it if the hospital does not have it on file.

## 3. Visitation Rights:

You have the right to have or refuse visitors, including but not limited to a spouse, domestic partner (including a same sex domestic partner) another family member, or a friend. You should feel confident that you will be able to be present with your partner at their bedside during visitation hours, and in accordance with limitations outlined in the hospital's visitation policy.