

Monday Report

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A DEEPER DIVE INTO HEALTHCARE PROXIES AND MOLST FORMS

Over the past two weeks, *Monday Report* has focused on tools that you can use to help in your **advance healthcare planning** – that is, ensuring that your wishes for your treatment are known and carried out in the event you become seriously ill.

The most important step that everyone age 18 and older should take, no matter their current health status, involves designating a **healthcare agent** – the person who can make medical decisions for the patient in the future event of an unexpected illness or accident. But for those patients currently with a serious advancing illness, the **MOLST form** – Massachusetts Medical Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment – is an important resource that merits serious attention. Information about **MOLST is here**; information about the **healthcare proxy form is here**.

As explained in previous issues of *Monday Report*, your healthcare agent is authorized to make medical decisions for you in the event you, through accident or illness, are unconscious or are suffering from dementia or another mental limitation. Your agent can be a friend or family member who has discussed with you your values, goals, and wishes about medical care. A healthcare proxy form is a **legal document** that is signed by you and two witnesses. It goes into effect when the patient who signed it is determined to lack the capacity to make his or her own healthcare decisions.

A MOLST form is a **medical order document**, which is similar to a prescription. It is signed by the patient and the clinician (physician, nurse practitioner or physician assistant) after serious discussions about the patient's current medical condition, what could happen next, the patient's values and goals for care, and possible risks and benefits of treatments that may be offered. The signed MOLST form stays with the patient and is to be honored by health professionals in any clinical care situation. It goes into effect immediately upon signing.

So what form has precedence? Say you have filled out a healthcare proxy form and named your agent, and within that proxy form you give your agent “unlimited” authority to initiate or withdraw certain forms of care. Then imagine that you become ill and fill out a MOLST form that specifically gives instructions to your care team about whether you want to be intubated or if you wish to be resuscitated in the event of cardiac failure. What happens if your agent disagrees with your MOLST form instructions?

According to the Massachusetts MOLST website: “If a patient has capacity to make healthcare decisions, the MOLST form should be honored. If the patient loses capacity, an invoked healthcare agent has the legal right to reverse decisions documented on the MOLST form, but the healthcare agent should consider his/her understanding of the patient’s wishes and goals of care.”

One other point: your designated agent could be, say, your oldest, dearest friend, and not necessarily a family member. In the event you are in an accident and can’t communicate your

wishes to the care team, that agent (your friend) carries more weight in making a decision about your care than, say, your husband or wife. While you certainly do not require an attorney to fill out any of these forms (the links above are good resources to detail the point-by-point nature of each form) those seeking further guidance relating to these issues, "living wills", Do Not Resuscitate directives, and other subjects may wish to consult an attorney.

PROXY AND MOLST RESOURCES

Advance care planning requires you to give serious thought to your values and wishes as they relate to what is arguably the most stressful time of your life – when you become seriously ill or unable to care for yourself.

The [Massachusetts Coalition for Serious Illness Care](#) has created an interesting interactive experience, [Write Your Script](#), which allows people to take a simple, six-question personality quiz that may give them insight about "how you would write the story of your life." It's a precursor exercise before taking the actual steps of advance care planning.

On Monday, April 24, from 9:30 a.m. to noon, the Massachusetts Medical Society and Honoring Choices, Mass. are co-hosting **MOLST: Meeting the Challenge** to discuss MOLST best practice and implementation challenges "to consistently know and honor an individual's choices at home, on transfer, and across all care settings." [View more information and register here.](#)

[PatientCareLink](#) contains information about advance healthcare planning; click on "Healthcare Planning Throughout Your Life" under the For Patients & Families Tab, or "Serious Illness Care" under Improving Patient Care.

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