

Healthcare Decision-Making and Proxy

Healthcare Decision-Making and Proxy Consent

1. Introduction

- Healthcare decision-making involves choosing treatment based on clinical evidence and patient values.
- Proxy consent applies when a patient cannot decide for themselves.

2. Capacity and Competence

- **Capacity:** the ability to understand information, weigh options, and communicate a choice.
- Adults are presumed to have capacity unless assessment shows otherwise.

3. Proxy Decision-Makers

- A proxy is a person authorised to decide for a patient lacking capacity.
- They may be appointed in advance or designated by law, often next of kin.

4. Standards for Proxy Decisions

- **Substituted judgment:** deciding as the patient would have chosen.
- **Best interests:** choosing what most benefits the patient when wishes are unknown.

5. Special Situations

- Children's decisions usually rest with parents or guardians.
- Emergencies may allow treatment without consent to preserve life.

6. Summary

- Sound decision-making respects capacity, evidence, and patient values.
- Proxy consent protects patients who cannot decide, guided by their wishes or best interests.