

Spouse might not become medical surrogate

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U.S. researchers say one-third of married individuals choose someone other than their spouse as a surrogate for medical decision-making.

Dr. Michael Lipkin of Northwestern University and colleagues also found when adult patients choose a parent, sibling or child, they often prefer their mothers, sisters and daughters to serve as medical proxies rather than their fathers, brothers and sons.

The findings are among the results of a study on advance care planning led by Lipkin, an assistant professor of clinical preventive medicine at Northwestern's Feinberg School of Medicine.

"When patients choose a surrogate who is not the person doctors would usually consult or who would not become empowered as a substitute decision-maker under state laws, physicians are alerted to engage these patients in an advance care planning process that ensures the formal appointment of their desired health care agent," Lipkin said, noting physicians do not ordinarily consider advance planning unless patients are elderly or seriously ill.

The study is detailed in the online early edition of the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*.

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