

# 4 Simple Questions to Ask Patients about their Substitute Decision Maker

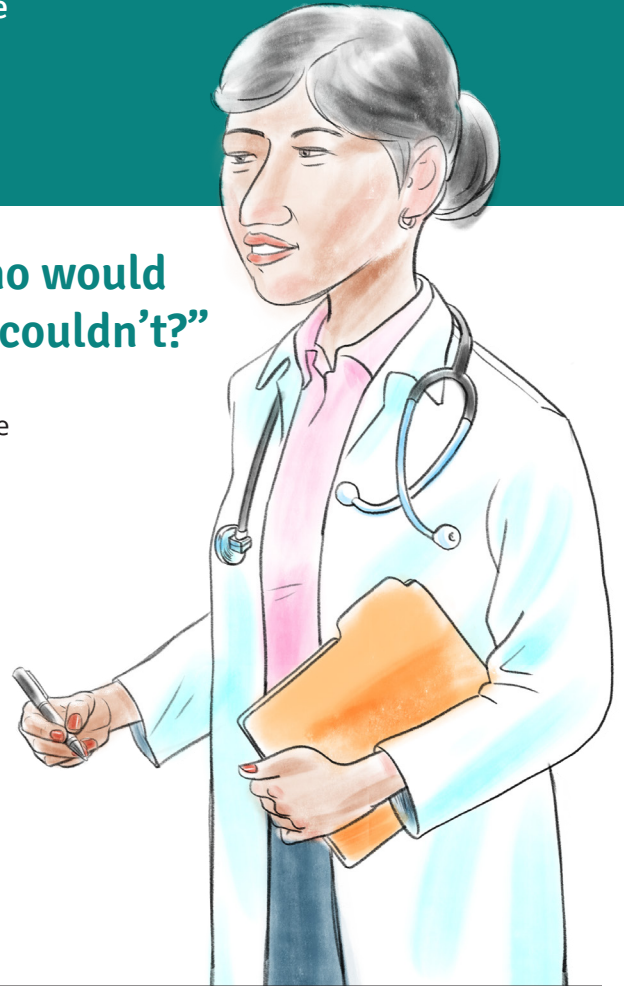
Your patient's Substitute Decision Maker (SDM) will make healthcare decisions for them if they are unable to do so. Your patient needs to choose their SDM. Walk them through the process using these 4 simple questions.

## Step 1: “Have you ever thought about who would make healthcare decisions for you if you couldn’t?”

Often the hardest part is getting the SDM conversation started. Opening with “Have you ever thought about...” is a great way to ease your patient into the topic. Or, try another question from this list.

“Have you ever thought about...”

- who you would like to speak for you if ever you cannot speak for yourself?”
- who would make healthcare decisions for you if you were too sick or hurt to speak for yourself?”
- who you would trust to make medical decisions for you?”
- who would you trust to make your healthcare decisions for you if you could not?”
- who would you want to make decisions on your behalf if something should happen to you and you were unable to talk for yourself?”



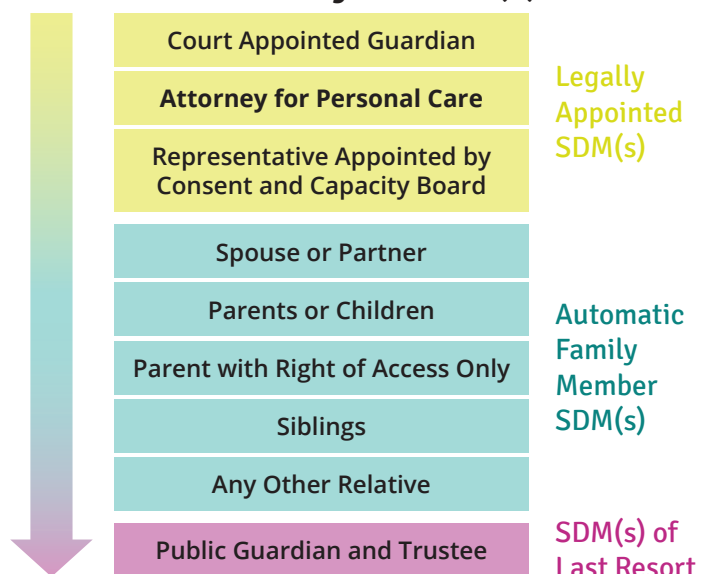
## Step 2: “Do you know who your SDM would be?”

According to Ontario law, your patient's automatic SDM is the person who ranks highest on the hierarchy. Ensure they understand who that will be.

Your patient's SDM must be:

- available when a decision is needed
- capable of giving consent
- willing to accept the role
- 16 Years or Older
- not prohibited to act as your SDM (e.g. by court order or separation agreement)

### The Hierarchy of SDM(s)



Ontario Health Care Consent Act, 1996

### Step 3: “Does your automatic SDM have the right qualities for the role?”

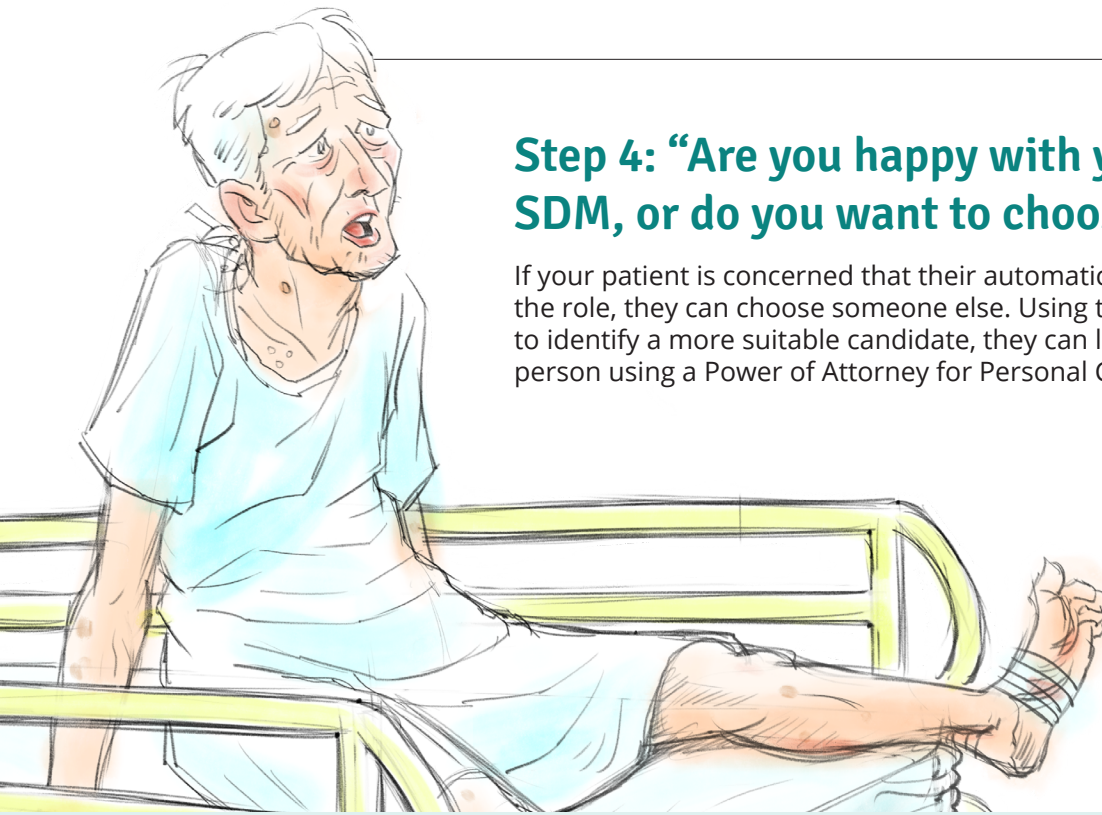
Being an SDM is a difficult job, and not everyone is right for the role. Ask these questions to help patients assess whether their automatic SDM is a good fit.

- “Would they be willing to make decisions on your behalf if you are too sick to do so?”
- “Are they willing to interpret, honour, and follow your wishes as much as possible in a given situation?”
- “Would they be able to make themselves available to your healthcare team either in person or by email, phone, or video?”
- “Are they willing to talk with you to understand your wishes, values and beliefs?”
- “Can they communicate clearly?”
- “Are they good under pressure? Can they make difficult decisions in stressful situations?”
- “Would they be willing to ask questions and talk to your healthcare team?”
- “Will they be okay making decisions on your behalf even if their own wishes are different from yours?”



### Step 4: “Are you happy with your automatic SDM, or do you want to choose someone else?”

If your patient is concerned that their automatic SDM is not a good fit for the role, they can choose someone else. Using the criteria from Step 3 to identify a more suitable candidate, they can legally appoint another person using a Power of Attorney for Personal Care form.



#### HINT

SDMs need to know that Advance Care Planning is about potential **future** care. As such, it's very different from healthcare consent situations that require decisions about **current** care. Previous Advance Care Planning conversations make healthcare decisions easier for an SDM. But a patient's wishes are NOT a replacement for healthcare consent.



**VITALOGUE**

Are you ready to start the conversation?

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