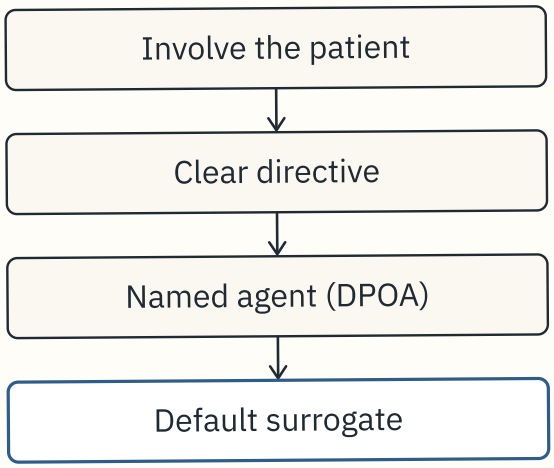
Who decides: the ladder

Apply directives, agents and surrogates in order



Step by step

1. Patient with capacity decides and can revoke a directive
2. Once capacity is lost, work down the ladder
3. Default order (most states): spouse, adult child, parent, adult sibling
4. Withholding equals withdrawing
5. Unresolved disagreement: ethics committee

Standard	Question it asks
Substituted judgment	What would the patient decide?
Best interest	Which option best weighs suffering, benefit, impairment, quality of life?

Two standards, in order

Ladder in one line

Involve patient, directive, agent, default surrogate

Substituted judgment first, best interest second

Exam traps

- ! The spouse leads only the default list, which applies when no agent was named.
- ! The surrogate's own preferences do not decide.
- ! Stopping a ventilator is no worse than never starting it.

Advance directives and surrogate decision-makers: who decides?

Video, written lesson, practice question and sources: medservatory.com/usmle-step-2-ck/ethics-law-patient-safety/advance-directives-surrogate-decision-makers-living-will-health-care-proxy

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