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The Massachusetts CARE Act: A Bright Future for Cooperation Between Healthcare and Family Caregivers

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Caring for a sick, disabled or incapacitated loved one can be a stressful proposition, but a new Massachusetts law aims to ease the burden by providing formal support to family caregivers. The Caregiver, Advise, Record, Enable (CARE) Act was signed into law by Governor Baker last year with the hope that the law is fully implemented by this fall. The CARE law acknowledges the essential role of family caregivers and requires state agencies to develop guidance for hospitals to ease post-hospitalization patient recovery. The CARE law provides that every hospital patient has the opportunity to designate a caregiver. The hospital must then notify the caregiver when the patient is about to be discharged, whether to another facility or home. Then instruction will be provided to the caregiver on how to perform follow-up medical tasks for the patient at home, such as managing medications or dressing wounds. With adequate information and training, outcomes for patient recovery will improve.

In light of the new CARE law, individuals undergoing medical procedures or entering care facilities should consider who to name as designated caregiver. In making this decision, one should consider a variety of factors including location, relationship and ability to provide adequate care. For example, it may not be advisable for a mother undergoing treatment in Massachusetts to designate her son who resides in California as caregiver.