

Module 2 - Case Study

The Substitute Decision Maker

Mrs. Alice Brown is a 74-year-old widowed woman living with Alzheimer's disease. In the last few years, Mrs. Brown's dementia has continued to worsen progressively. She was no longer able to care for herself and relied on the help of her neighbour. Six months ago, Mrs. Brown was admitted to your Long Term Care Home.

Before the admission, her neighbour and longtime friend Betty was helping her every day. Mrs. Brown's family consists of her only sister Karen who lives in Florida. Mrs. Brown also has two nephews (Karen's sons). Tim lives in the same town and visits regularly. Brian lives in Nova Scotia.

Mrs. Brown is having increased difficulty swallowing her medications safely and staff are reporting her intake has decreased significantly since admission. The team has reviewed her current medications and are recommending discontinuing a number of them.

1. Who do you speak to first? Mrs. Brown

Explanation: The Health Care Provider must determine if Mrs. Brown is mentally capable with respect to the decision (e.g., discontinuing medication). Only if they determine that Mrs. Brown is mentally incapable, would they then turn to her Substitute Decision Maker.

2. Prioritize the Substitute Decision Makers list and explain your rationale: 1. Her sister Karen; 2. Nephews

Explanation: According to the hierarchy of Substitute Decision Makers, Karen is highest ranked on the hierarchy (Mrs. Brown's sister).

Mrs. Brown's nephews would be next highest on the list of Substitute Decision Makers (any other relatives).

A friend is not part of the hierarchy of Substitute Decision Makers. The only way Betty could be Mrs. Brown's Substitute Decision Maker is if Mrs. Brown appointed her when she was mentally capable in a Power of Attorney for Personal Care.

Note. In addition to be highest on the list, SDM(s) must meet the requirements to be a Substitute Decision Maker. The requirements will be covered in the next section.