DO NOT RESUSCITATE (DNR): FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT DOES DNR MEAN?

DNR stands for "do not resuscitate." A person who does not wish to have cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) performed may make this wish known through a physician's order called a DNR order. A DNR order addresses the various methods used to revive people whose hearts have stopped functioning or who have stopped breathing. Examples of these treatments include chest compressions, electric heart shock, artificial breathing tubes and special drugs. These standardized DNR orders allow patients to choose the extent of the treatment they wish to receive at the end of life. A patient may choose to be DNR Comfort Care (DNRCC) or a DNR Comfort Care – Arrest (DNRCC-Arrest).

DOES OHIO HAVE A LAW CONCERNING DNR ORDERS?

Yes. Ohio adopted a law concerning DNR orders in 1998.

HOW CAN I GET A DNR ORDER?

An individual may obtain a DNRCC by consulting with his or her physician regarding end-of-life issues. The DNRCC allows this specific DNR order to be used in multiple settings and practice areas including but not limited to nursing facilities, residential care facilities, hospitals, outpatient areas, homes and public places. For a DNR order to be useful in multiple settings, it must be recognizable by health care workers. The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) has developed a standard form that is generally recognized. Unlike a living will and health care power of attorney, a DNR order must be written and signed by a physician or an advanced-practice nurse after consultation with the patient.

WHAT IS THE DNR PROTOCOL?

The DNR protocol lists the specific actions paramedics, emergency medical technicians, physicians or nurses will take when attending to a DNR patient. The protocol also specifies actions that will not be implemented. The standard DNR protocol is to be used for a patient whose physician or advanced-practice nurse has written a DNR order.

THE DNR PROTOCOL – WHEN IS IT ACTIVATED?

Under the DNR protocol, a patient must choose between DNRCC and DNRCC – Arrest status, which in turn, determines when the DNR protocol is activated:

1) DNR Comfort Care (DNRCC) – a person receives any care that eases pain and suffering, but no resuscitative measures to save or sustain life. This protocol is activated immediately when a valid DNR order is issued or when a living will requesting no CPR becomes effective.

2) DNR Comfort Care – Arrest (DNRCC-Arrest) – a person receives standard medical care until the time he or she experiences a cardiac or respiratory arrest. Standard medical care may include cardiac monitoring or intubation prior to the occurrence of cardiac or respiratory arrest. This protocol is activated when the patient has a cardiac or respiratory arrest.

   "Cardiac arrest" means absence of a palpable pulse. "Respiratory arrest" means absence of spontaneous respirations or presence of agonal breathing.

Once the protocol is activated, the health care provider

WILL:

- Suction the airway
- Administer oxygen
- Provide pain medications
- Position for comfort
- Splint or immobilize
- Control bleeding
- Provide emotional support; contact other health care providers

WILL NOT:

- Start chest compressions
- Insert an artificial airway
- Administer resuscitaiton drugs
- Defibrillate or cardiovert
- Administer respiratory assistance

- Use resuscitative IV lines
- Initiate cardiac monitoring.

DOES DNR COMFORT CARE MEAN "DO NOT TREAT?"

The DNRCC protocol is very specific in terms of what treatment is to be given and what treatment is to be withheld. Only those items listed on the "will not" list are to be withheld. The items listed on the "will" list, along with any other treatment that may be needed for the patient's condition, may be provided as appropriate.

CAN I SIGN MY OWN DNR ORDER?

No. A DNR order must be written and signed by a physician or an advanced-practice nurse after consultation with the patient.

CAN ANYONE ELSE OVERRIDE MY WISHES ABOUT CPR EVEN THOUGH A VALID DNR ORDER EXISTS?

No. You have the right to make your own decisions about your health care. If you are not able to express your wishes, other people such as a legal guardian, a person you name as your health care power of attorney, or a family member can speak for you. You should make sure these people know your desires about CPR and that you have a DNR order.

WHAT IF I CHANGE MY MIND AFTER MY PHYSICIAN WRITES A DNR ORDER?

You always have the right to change your mind and request CPR. If you do change your mind, you should talk with your physician right away about revoking your DNR order. You should also tell your family and caregivers about your decision.

IF I AM NOT ABLE TO DECIDE ABOUT CPR FOR MYSELF, WHO WILL DECIDE?

First, two doctors must determine that you are unable to decide about CPR. You will be told of this determination and have the right to object.

If you become unable to decide about CPR, and you did not tell your doctor or others about your wishes in advance, a DNR order can be written with the consent of someone chosen by you, by a family member or by a close friend. The person highest on the following list will decide about CPR for you:

- The person chosen by you to make health care decisions
- A court-appointed guardian
- Your closest relative (spouse, child, parent, sibling)
- Close friend

UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES CAN A FAMILY MEMBER OR CLOSE FRIEND DECIDE A DNR ORDER SHOULD BE WRITEN?

A family member or close friend can consent to a DNR order only when you are unable to decide for yourself and you have not appointed someone to decide for you. Your family member or close friend can consent to a DNR order when:

- You are terminally ill
- You are permanently unconscious
- CPR will not work (would be medically futile)
- CPR would impose an extraordinary burden on you given your medical condition and the expected outcome of CPR

Anyone deciding for you must base the decision on your wishes, including your religious and moral beliefs, or if your wishes are not known, on your best interests.

HOW DOES SOMEONE KNOW I AM A DNR COMFORT CARE PATIENT?

Your DNR order (your physician or advanced-practice nurse will give you a copy) can serve as evidence you are a DNRCC patient and you desire the statewide standard DNR protocol to be used at the appropriate time. A wallet ID card and a hospital type wristband also are available to identify you as a DNRCC patient. You are not required to carry the ID card or to wear an identification bracelet. However, if a provider cannot identify you as a DNRCC patient, all efforts to resuscitate you and to sustain life will be applied as this is an appropriate and legal response in the absence of definitive DNR identification.

Under the law, emergency medical services (EMS) workers are not required to search patients for DNR identification. However, if DNR identification is discovered, the EMS personnel must make reasonable efforts to verify the patient's identity. After verification, the workers must honor the DNR directive and follow the DNR protocol. The law provides immunity to EMS workers who follow the DNR directive.

WHERE CAN I GET A DNR COMFORT CARE WALLET ID CARD OR BRACELET?

The DNRCC wallet ID card will be available through you physician or advance-practice nurse. The DNRCC hospital type identification wristband (bracelet) is available from hospitals, nursing homes and any other source with the capability to fabricate this type of bracelet. The format for the wallet ID and the bracelet insert can be accessed at the ODH Web site: http://www.odh.ohio.gov. ODH also maintains a listing of commercial agents who MAY be able to supply the bracelet, wristband or necklace.

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