



Medical Advisory

MA-2023-03

Acceptance of Verbal or Written Do Not Resuscitate Requests

For: Paramedics certified by the RPPEO

Issue date: April 19, 2023

Effective date: April 19, 2023 until rescinded on December 27, 2023 due to revision of Policy CLI 230

Key message

In cases of cardiac arrest where a patient's wishes are for do not resuscitate (DNR) but no Ministry of Health DNR Confirmation Form is available, paramedics should consider patching to a Base Hospital Physician (BHP) to consult on the appropriateness of withholding further resuscitation.

Procedure

If a paramedic:

- a. assesses a patient to be vital signs absent (patient confirmed to be pulseless), and
- b. they are made aware that the patient had a prior capable wish to not receive resuscitation in this circumstance, and
- c. this wish is believed by paramedics to be valid, then
- d. a patch to a BHP can be initiated at the earliest opportunity to consult on the appropriateness of withholding further resuscitation.

If there is any dispute, disagreement, or uncertainty amongst family or providers as to the validity of the request, resuscitation should be undertaken per BLS and ALS patient care standards (PCS).

Background

Paramedics are required to respect patient's wishes with respect to treatment if made while capable, and substitute decision makers (SDMs) are authorized to express a patient's wishes when they are not capable. The BLS-PCS DNR Standard recognizes the Ministry of Health DNR

Confirmation Form as the only official expression of patient wishes for no resuscitation after death. Consequently, patients often undergo unwanted resuscitation efforts despite direction from SDMs or other supporting documents.

With respect to consent to treatment, the ALS PCS states, “If a patient is incapable of consenting to a proposed treatment plan, and the paramedic is aware or is made aware that the person has a prior capable wish with respect to the proposed treatment, they must respect that wish (for example, if the person does not wish to be resuscitated)” (ALS PCS 5.1, Page 5). The RPPEO believes the ALS PCS Consent to Treatment Standard and the *Health Care Consent Act, 1996, S.O. 1996, c. 2, Sched. A* enable paramedics to apply clinical judgment and make patient-centered decisions about treatment at the scene of cardiac arrests, specifically where the patient’s wishes to withhold resuscitation are known. This includes verbal expression from a substitute decision maker of the patient’s wishes, or written DNR form other than the Ministry of Health DNR Confirmation Form.

In order to comply with the BLS PCS, a patch is required to a BHP for direction to withhold or terminate resuscitation, so please consider doing this at your first opportunity to help respect patient wishes.



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Educational Video Message from Dr. Mark Froats, RPPEO Associate Medical Director
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