

EMS personnel should be aware of the role they play in responding to an expected death at home. EMS personnel must ensure the patient's wishes are respected and that no unintended interventions occur.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba (CPSM) developed Guideline 108 to assist physicians in planning for continuity of care for terminally ill patients who are expected to die at home. Emergency Services Branch, Manitoba Health, was represented in the author group for the CPSM guideline and provided input to ensure the role of EMS personnel is taken into account. In an attempt to introduce EMS personnel to the CPSM guideline and mirror the guideline's intention, Manitoba Health developed a guideline to elaborate and expand on the role of EMS personnel in this setting.

A physician caring for a patient expected to die at home will assist the patient and their family to plan for the death. Part of the planning includes notification of a number of agencies, including EMS, of the expected death. The planning includes a number of forms clearly indicating an expected death at home, expressing the patient's wishes. Examples of these forms are included in the Appendix.

EMS personnel must uphold the wishes of a dying patient, as they are expressed in these forms. EMS personnel must also ensure the continuity of care of the terminally ill during the process of dying within the home environment, and during transport to a hospital or another facility, for palliative or comfort care.

## **GENERAL**

### **Health Care Directives**

- also referred to as "advance directives", "living wills", or "end of life directives"
- EMS personnel must be familiar with current legislation governing Health Care Directives Act and End of Life Directive
- when attending a call and a health care directive document is presented, EMS personnel must ensure
  - the person that made the directive is 16 years of age or older
  - the form and information provided clearly identifies the person to whom the health care directive document applies
    - document must be in writing, signed, and dated
  - the patient is the person referred to in the health care directive
  - identification is made of any procedures authorized or prohibited by the patient in the health care directive
- Patients with procedures either authorized or prohibited in a valid health care directive
  - obtain the health care directive document from family or caregivers
  - identify the patient
  - obtain a medical history
  - perform patient assessment
  - record vital signs and level of consciousness
  - if EMS personnel are satisfied the health care directive document is valid, and the directions are within scope of practice, the instructions must be respected

## GENERAL: Response to an Expected Death at Home

- Patients **with absent vital signs** who have a valid health care directive to not resuscitate
  - obtain the health care directive document from family or caregivers
  - identify the patient
  - obtain a medical history
  - if EMS personnel are satisfied the health care directive document is valid, CPR and other resuscitation is not to be performed
  - provide support and advice to the family
- Patients **with vital signs** who have a valid health care directive to not resuscitate
  - obtain the health care directive document from family or caregivers
  - identify the patient
  - obtain a medical history
  - perform patient assessment
  - record vital signs and level of consciousness
  - if EMS personnel are satisfied the health care directive document is valid, CPR and other resuscitation is not to be performed
  - provide supportive care to the patient:
    - in the event of respiratory distress
      - administer oxygen by mask without ventilatory assistance
      - suction as needed
      - place patient in position of comfort
    - in the event of hemorrhage
      - implement standard basic life support care for hemorrhage
    - in the event of fracture
      - immobilize in the standard manner for patient comfort
    - in the event of uncontrolled pain or nausea
      - permit family or other caregivers to administer the patient's prescribed medication
- The following would be considered inappropriate care of a patient with a valid health care directive that indicates no resuscitation
  - CPR
  - invasive airway maneuvers
  - ventilatory support
  - intravenous cannulation
- Documentation should be thorough and careful
  - document who provided the health care directive document
  - document the circumstances fully, including patient assessments, vital signs assessments, and any treatments initiated

### **SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- Inadequate documentation
  - if documentation is inadequate, illegible, altered, or (in the judgement of EMS personnel) is not legitimate and there is not an obvious sign of death (see Treatment Guideline G15), personnel should initiate CPR and other approved procedures based on treatment protocol(s)
  - explain to the family why this is being done
  - document the reasons for doing so

## GENERAL: Response to an Expected Death at Home

- CPR initiated and a valid health care directive document subsequently produced
  - resuscitative efforts should be discontinued when EMS personnel confirm valid document
    - document time and reasons resuscitation was discontinued
- valid health care directive document present but family objection evident
  - the patient's wishes regarding resuscitation are paramount. However, on occasion, the family may vigorously and persistently insist on resuscitation being performed, even in the presence of a valid health care directive document
  - EMS personnel should attempt to convince the family to honor the patient's decision to withhold resuscitative efforts
  - if the family persists, initiate resuscitation within EMS personnel scope of practice
- documentation should be thorough and careful in all cases
- this Treatment Guideline must be used in conjunction with the "Health Care Directives Act" Guideline because the two address patients who have specific wishes related to care at a time when they may not be able to express these wishes