



“Do Not Resuscitate” (DNR) Orders and Comfort Care

What does a “Do Not Resuscitate” order mean?

A “Do Not Resuscitate” (DNR) order indicates that a person – usually with a terminal illness or other serious medical condition – will not receive cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) in the event his or her heart or breathing stops. A DNR order is written by a physician after discussing the burdens and benefits of CPR with the patient or the patient’s surrogate decision maker.

If CPR saves lives, why would anyone want a DNR order?

CPR can often involve more than just chest compressions and mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. CPR can also include the use of powerful drugs or electric shock to start the heart beating again, or may require the insertion of a breathing tube. Although CPR can save lives, it frequently does not work. Even if a person is resuscitated, he or she may suffer painful injuries during CPR or may be left in a worse condition than before. Also, people with terminal illnesses or other serious medical conditions might not want to have CPR performed on them, even if that means they might die as a result.

You and your physician should discuss the burdens and benefits of CPR and the options that are best for you in your medical condition.

In some situations, CPR will not be life-saving, and will only cause harm. If your physician believes strongly that this is the case, he or she will discuss with you why CPR is not being offered as an option.

How do I make my CPR wishes known?

If you do not wish to receive CPR during a medical emergency, you must discuss your wishes with your physician who can inform you about the details of a DNR order. You have the right to refuse CPR, but you may not be able to state your wishes during a medical emergency.

What does Ohio law say about DNR orders?

Ohio law recognizes a standard category of DNR orders called DNR Comfort Care, which protects a person's right to choose not to receive CPR. State-approved DNR Comfort Care orders are designed to prevent health care professionals and emergency workers from performing CPR, whether you are inside or outside of a health care facility. However, health care professionals will be required to provide you with comfort care, even if CPR is withheld. Comfort care is any action taken to promote patient comfort, such as administering pain medications or offering emotional support.

State-approved DNR Comfort Care orders cannot be cancelled by a family member without your consent, and are considered "portable" because they remain in effect as you travel to and from a hospital or other health care facility or while you are at home.

What are my options for DNR orders?

There are three different types of DNR orders available at Cleveland Clinic hospitals. The first two options are based on the Ohio-approved DNR Comfort Care orders.

- 1. DNR Comfort Care:** DNR Comfort Care orders (DNRCC) require that only comfort measures be administered before, during, or after the time a person's heart or breathing stops. This type of order is generally regarded as proper for a person with a terminal illness, short life expectancy, or with little chance of surviving CPR.
- 2. DNR Comfort Care-Arrest:** DNR Comfort Care-Arrest (DNRCC-Arrest) orders permit the use of life-saving measures (such as powerful heart or blood pressure medications) before a person's heart or breathing stops. However, only comfort care may be provided after a person's heart or breathing stops.
- 3. DNR Specified:** Valid only at Cleveland Clinic hospitals, DNR-Specified orders are uniquely tailored by your physician. These orders may permit the use of some CPR treatment methods (for example, powerful medications) while possibly prohibiting other methods (such as electric shock).

Options at Cleveland Clinic Hospitals

All three options are available to you if you are hospitalized in a Cleveland Clinic hospital. The first two types of DNR orders can be changed to outpatient DNR orders when you leave the hospital. If you are an outpatient, the third type of DNR order (DNR Specified) cannot be written for you.

Talk with Your Doctor

If you are considering having a DNR order written, you should discuss these options with your physician to determine which DNR order might be the best for you, given your medical condition and your wishes.

How will health care professionals know what DNR order I have?

While in the hospital, you will be asked to wear a plastic DNR alert wrist band that is PURPLE in color. Your medical record will specify which of the DNR orders has been written for you.

If you are able to leave the hospital and you want a DNRCC or DNRCC-Arrest order to remain as part of your treatment plan, your physician can provide you with a state-approved DNR identification form and information about obtaining a state-approved DNR wallet identification card, a DNR bracelet, or DNR necklace.

If you receive care at home, you should tell your family and caregivers where to find your DNR order form and identification.

What happens if I have a DNR order and I need surgery?

In the event that you need surgery, you and your physician will re-evaluate your DNR order prior to the procedure. Together, you and your physician will decide what treatment methods should be used during surgery and immediately afterward. If you and your physician decide to change your DNR order for the time period immediately before, during and after the surgery, your physician will note the change in your medical record using the DNR Specified option.

What happens to my DNR order once I leave the hospital?

State-approved DNR orders (DNRCC and DNRCC-Arrest) remain in effect once you are discharged from the hospital, and should be honored by emergency squads and other healthcare professionals throughout Ohio. Before leaving the hospital, you should talk to your physician about providing you with a state-approved DNR identification form or information about

obtaining other means of identification, such as a state-approved DNR wallet identification card, a DNR bracelet or DNR necklace.

DNR Specified orders apply only within a Cleveland Clinic hospital. If you have a DNR Specified order and are leaving the hospital, the order ends when you are discharged from the hospital. You and your physician should discuss the option of changing the order to a DNR Comfort Care or DNR Comfort Care-Arrest order.

What if I change my mind after a DNR order is written?

You always have the right to change your mind and request that CPR be administered during a medical emergency. If you change your mind, you should inform your physician and nurse immediately so that your DNR order may be revoked. You also should inform your family and other caregivers of the change in your decision.

If you have changed your mind and you are outside of the hospital, you should destroy all DNR forms and identification that you are wearing or were given.

What if I am healthy now but do not want CPR if I become terminally ill?

You can appoint a Medical Power of Attorney for health care decisions and discuss your wishes in advance with that person.

You can also state in a Living Will that you do not want CPR. However, a Living Will does not apply in Ohio until you become terminally ill or permanently unconscious and can no longer make your own health care decisions. In Ohio, your Living Will takes effect once two physicians determine that your condition meets either of these criteria. Your physician will then write one of the DNR Comfort Care orders according to your specified wishes.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Ohio Advance Directives

Information on Ohio advance directives as well as the documents can be found at:

www.ohanet.org - type the words "Choices Packet" in the search box

Ohio Advance Directives - in Spanish

Ohio advance directive documents in Spanish can be found at:

Medical Power of Attorney:

www.ohpco.org/pdf/SpanishAdvDir/dec04_spanish_healthcarepowerofattorney.pdf

Living Will: http://www.ohpco.org/pdf/SpanishAdvDir/dec04_spanish_livingwill.pdf

Ohio Advance Directives - for visually-impaired patients

<http://www.ohpco.org/pdf/largefontads.pdf>

Advance Directives Forms - by State

<http://uslwr.com/formslst.shtm>

National Institutes of Health

<http://clinicalcenter.nih.gov/participate/patientinfo/legal.shtml>

Contact Us

For more information, contact the Ethics Committee at your hospital.

At the Cleveland Clinic main campus, contact the Department of Bioethics at 216.444.8720 or 800.223.2273 ext. 48270.

This information is not intended to replace the medical advice of your doctor or health care provider. Please consult your health care provider for advice about a specific medical condition.