

Ethics Rx

an electronic bulletin from VHA's

National Center for Ethics in Health Care

October 29, 2002

Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) Protocols: Policy Change

- 1) Effective immediately, VHA will no longer limit DNR orders to patients who are terminally ill. This change is reflected in VHA Handbook 1004.3, *Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) Protocols Within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)*, dated October 24, 2002, which replaces the manual chapter, *Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) Protocols Within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), M-2, Part I, Chapter 30*. Local policies should be reviewed and modified to incorporate this change.
- 2) Before this policy change, VHA policy restricted DNR orders to patients who were terminally ill. In the 1980s, when VHA's DNR policy was first written, this restriction was viewed as a necessary safeguard to ensure the appropriate use of this relatively new practice. But since DNR orders are now widely accepted, restricting DNR orders to terminally ill patients is viewed by many as an infringement on patient rights.
- 3) According to the new policy, any patient (or authorized surrogate) may request a DNR order. Before entering a DNR order, physicians have an obligation to assure that the DNR decision is fully informed. Since DNR requests are relatively uncommon among patients who are not terminally ill, careful communication and documentation of patient wishes under such circumstances are especially important.
- 4) This interim change has been made but there is more work to be done. The National Center for Ethics in Health Care has begun a comprehensive revision of the Handbook that will involve soliciting and incorporating input from many stakeholders, and review and concurrence by all relevant offices. We appreciate the input from the field that, in part, lead to this very important interim policy change and encourage the further exchange of ideas and concerns for this policy throughout the revision process.
- 5) Handbook 1004.3 is available at: www.va.gov/vhaethics/download/dnrpolicy.doc or vaww.va.gov/vhaethics/download/dnrpolicy.doc.
- 6) If you have questions about this policy change, please contact my office via MS Outlook at VHA Ethics (vaethics@hq.med.va.gov).

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