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DO-NOT-RESUSCITATE (DNR) ORDERS

What is a DNR?

It's a legal directive to withhold cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) or advanced cardiac life support (ACLS) in the event your heart stops or you were to stop breathing. It allows emergency medical services, medical staff, and caregivers to respect the patient's wish to die a natural death.

What DNR does NOT do?

A DNR does not prevent medical professionals from delivering *any* medical treatment other than CPR and ACLS. In the event your heart or breathing stops, the DNR simply directs medical personnel to withhold efforts to restart your breathing or heartbeat.

What are the procedures for putting a DNR into place and ensuring it's complied with?

Unfortunately there is no universally valid DNR form. Each state accepts a different form so you'll want to be sure to complete the Maine form, which is endorsed by Maine EMS. The form becomes valid once you and your physician, nurse, or physician's assistant sign it. EMS protocols state that crews will honor any order which is signed within a year. If your DNR order is one or more years old, you and your physician should re-sign it.

If you'd like the DNR order to be effective in a hospital, hospice or home health setting, you must consult with your physician. The signed form is not enough under these circumstances; the physician must physically include the signed DNR order in your medical care plan.

In an emergency situation, medical personnel must make treatment decisions in an instant. Therefore it's important to have available the information they need to honor your desires. You should carry the DNR itself with you if possible. Otherwise it's best to keep the form in the most visible area near you. A refrigerator, bedroom door, or bedside tabletop is often a good place to store the document. You can also get EMS-approved health alert jewelry (e.g. MedicAlert), which is oftentimes the most convenient and fail-safe option for ensuring ambulance crews abide by your DNR decision. You should also provide copies to your local EMS agency and your hospital's emergency room.

If I change my mind, how do I make sure the DNR is revoked?

You should destroy the document itself and remove any health alert jewelry from your person. In addition you should inform your physician(s) and any other medical caregivers of your decision to revoke the DNR.