

Preparing for a Death in the Dialysis Clinic

A death occurring in a dialysis clinic is a stressful event for all involved: staff, patients, and any visitors who may be at the clinic. Careful planning can help reduce some of the stress. Below is a list of items that will help staff be more prepared in responding to a death occurring in the dialysis clinic.

1. All staff members should know where to find information about which patients are to be resuscitated and which patients have Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) orders. A model Patient Resuscitation Statement can be found at www.kidneyeol.org.*
2. Staff members should know who is authorized to pronounce death in their state.
3. State by state advance directive forms may be found at www.caringinfo.org. Talk with all patients to educate them about advance directives and code status. A patient education document about cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) called “What Happens if My Heart Stops Beating?” is available at the Kidney End-of-Life Coalition website at www.kidneyeol.org.
4. All patients should have up-to-date emergency contact information in the medical record.
5. For patients who have DNR orders, documenting their preferred funeral home contact information in the medical record would be helpful. Patient’s permission to contact the funeral home in the event of death in the dialysis unit can be obtained and documented in the medical record. A Funeral Home Information form is available at www.kidneyeol.org as well as a Personal Dispositions Form for logging personal belongings if patients expire at the clinic. An information card containing pertinent information such as next of kin, funeral home contact with phone number, and coroner’s phone number should be kept in a notebook at the nursing station. Blank CMS 2746 ESRD Death Notification forms should also be kept in the notebook so that everything that is needed to address the event is readily available. CMS 2746 ESRD forms are available from your Network office or at <http://www.simsproject.com/downloads/cds/CMS-2746.pdf>.
6. Periodically review patients’ code status at staff meetings and practice running through a resuscitative situation in the clinic. Discern the roles of each staff member, address privacy issues (screens around the patient), and who will be available to provide emotional support to other patients who may witness emergency situations in the clinic. Discuss differences which may occur in procedures and the roles of staff for situations of resuscitation and situations of not resuscitating. Review your company’s policies and procedures.
7. Decide upon a designated location in your clinic for the body while waiting for a funeral home or a coroner to arrive.
8. Provide support to staff by educating them on how to tell a family member that a patient has died as well as teaching the staff how to recognize and deal with their own grief responses. A step-by-step document on pronouncement of death and three brief staff exercises on dealing with death and dying are available at www.kidneyeol.org.
9. Be aware of confidentiality issues and HIPAA regulations. For example, once a death is public knowledge an obituary could be posted in the dialysis unit. This would be a way to inform other patients about the death of their peer patients without violating confidentiality.