

Do Not Attempt Resuscitation (DNAR, also known as DNACPR and, previously, DNR)

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"Talking about death does not make it more likely to happen."

*Patricia Brayden,
Medical Director,
St Catherine's Hospice,
Crawley*

What is a DNAR form?

DNAR stands for Do Not Attempt Resuscitation; also described as DNACPR: Do Not Attempt Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR). A DNAR form is an instruction to healthcare professionals **not** to perform CPR.

What is CPR?

CPR involves rapid, repeated compression of a person's chest, blowing air or oxygen into their lungs, if necessary by inserting a tube into their windpipe, delivery of high-voltage electric shocks through their chest and injection of drugs into the neck. These interventions are taking over the role of the person's heart and lungs to pump blood and oxygen around their body.

Why should I complete a DNACPR form?

At a certain stage in our lives and/or illness we reach a point where CPR has an almost zero chance of success. At best, it may prolong our life for a few hours or days on life support machines. So, if our heart and breathing stop and CPR is attempted, it subjects us to an extremely vigorous physical intervention that may deprive us and those important to us of a dignified death. In other words, it may merely prolong the process of dying and, in doing so, prolong or increase suffering. Without a DNACPR in place healthcare professionals (including ambulance staff) are required to attempt CPR.

Is a DNACPR a legal document?

A DNACPR is not a legally binding document. If you wish to record your decision in a legal document you can describe your decision not to receive CPR in your ADRT. However, a DNACPR properly completed and signed by a healthcare professional will be respected by those attending to your medical needs.

What does a DNACPR cover?

A DNACPR form **only** covers CPR, so **even** if you have a DNACPR in place you'll still be given all other types of treatment for your condition as well as treatment to ensure you're comfortable and pain-free.

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"What leads up to our last moments varies for each of us but what we all share in common in dying is that, as a last event, our hearts will stop, bringing an end to our life. Technically, therefore, each of us will have suffered a cardiac arrest. In our hospital system, should that final event be noted, someone will perform CPR unless there is a DNACPR form (Do Not Attempt Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation) in place.

"Terrible physical trauma will be inflicted on the recently dead person and psychological trauma on the family, friends, other patients, and the ward and resuscitation staff. Sadly, none of these clinically frail individuals could ever survive CPR. We need to ensure that all of us – patients, families, friends, nurses, doctors, administrators and legislators – accept that the end of natural life is characterised by "the end of living, heart stopping, dying".

Dr Gordon Caldwell

Who can help me with this?

A DNACPR needs to be signed by a healthcare professional and they will not do so unless they believe it to be in your best interests.

Can my family create a DNACPR on my behalf if I do not have capacity to do so?

Your 'next of kin' or other family members do not have the right to put a DNACPR in place for you. Your lasting power of attorney can act on your behalf and ask a healthcare professional to sign a DNACPR.

Can anyone else create a DNACPR for me?

If you live in a care home the manager may discuss it with you (or your family if you no longer have capacity) and your GP and create one as a decision taken in your best interests.

If you are admitted to hospital your healthcare team may put a DNACPR in place, again based on a decision taken in your best interests and in consultation with your lasting power of attorney and/or your family.

It is important to understand that this form only covers CPR, so even if you have a DNACPR in place you'll still be given all other types of treatment for your condition as well as treatment to ensure you are comfortable and pain-free.



Action List

- Discuss this with a healthcare professional to establish whether and when it will be appropriate for you to have a DNACPR in place.
- Complete and sign the form – your medical team will use a form recognised in your area.
- See the Factsheet on page 57 for suggestions on how to ensure it is available when needed. Note that photocopies are not recognised as valid.