

IMPROVEMENTS TO PROCESSES ABOUT RESPECTING PATIENT CHOICES

The complainant, who had a chronic medical condition, wrote to the Commission to complain about a public hospital. He reported that while he was an inpatient he noticed on his medical file that it was documented that he should not be resuscitated if he needed to be maintained on life support. The complainant advised that he was never consulted nor had he signed any authority allowing the doctors or the hospital to follow this course. It was his opinion that the directive had been placed in his records at the whim of some doctor. The complainant requested the Commission to have the offending instruction removed and the offending medical practitioner counselled.

Preliminary inquiries were undertaken which included liaison with the complainant's Carer, review of medical records, discussions with hospital staff and review of policies across NT Acute Care. As a result of these inquiries the "Not For Resuscitation" order was removed from the complainant's medical record.

In addition the Commission recommended that the hospital update all its Acute Care policies to include the requirement that the patient and family/primary caregiver sign the medical record to confirm any record of discussion in relation to life support issues. It was also recommended that this change in policy be communicated to all staff at all hospitals and included in staff orientation.

Following the recommendation the department's medical advisory committee and acute care executive considered the existing policies surrounding this issue and agreed that there should be wider consultation. Federal funding has subsequently been provided to the department to implement a project for 12 months called Respecting Patient Choices. A report to both the Commonwealth and NT governments will be submitted at the conclusion of the project. The project will pick up on the recommendations made by the Commission