THE ROLE OF THE REGISTERED NURSE, LICENSED PRACTICAL NURSE, AND LICENSED NURSING ASSISTANT IN INITIATING AND WITHHOLDING CARDIOPULMONARY RESUSCITATION

Question: What are the circumstances in which a Registered Nurse (RN), Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN), or Licensed Nursing Assistant (LNA) is not obligated to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) in the absence of a Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) order?

Definition(s):
Rigor Mortis: the stiffness that occurs in bodies after death

Dependent Lividity: a purplish color assumed by the lowest-lying part of a recently dead body due to downward flow and pooling of blood under the influence of gravity

Background:
The nurse licensed by the Vermont State Board of Nursing is expected to engage in the practice of nursing in accordance with accepted standards of practice. According to the American Heart Association, a patient who is found to be in cardiac arrest will receive CPR unless:

- The patient has a valid Do Not Attempt Resuscitation (DNR, DNAR) order; OR
- The patient exhibits irrefutable signs of death (e.g. decapitation, decomposition, rigor mortis, or dependent lividity).

In the absence of a DNR order and in the absence of irrefutable signs of death, the nurse (RN / LPN / LNA) who is certified in CPR is expected to initiate CPR when a patient has a cardiac arrest.

Position Statement which Reflects Nurse’s Roles and Responsibilities:

When a patient has suffered a cardiac arrest, a Registered Nurse, Licensed Practical Nurse, or Licensed Nursing Assistant who is CPR certified is expected to begin CPR unless:

- The patient has a valid Do Not Attempt Resuscitation (DNR, DNAR) order; OR
- The patient exhibits irrefutable signs of death (e.g. decapitation, decomposition, rigor mortis, or dependent lividity).

References/Citations:

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This opinion is subject to change as changes in nursing practice occur.