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Protecting the rights of older people: Commissioner's joint statement on older people being pressurised to sign Do Not Attempt CPR forms

Protecting the rights of older people: Commissioner's joint statement on older people being pressurised to sign Do Not Attempt CPR forms

06 April, 2020



We are seeing shocking examples (1) where blanket decisions seem to be being made about the care and treatment options that will be available to older and vulnerable people, who have felt pressurised into signing Do Not Attempt CPR forms.

Alongside this, many of the people affected have experienced fear and anxiety, and that their lives and wishes do not matter. This is shameful and unacceptable.

Difficult and painful decisions will need to be made in the weeks ahead, but these must be made on a case-by-case basis, taking account of the risks and benefits, and people's own wishes, through honest discussions between patients, doctors and families. Whether or not to sign a DNA-CPR form is an individual's decision, and they have a right to make that decision without feeling pressurised.

We do not underestimate the significant pressures being faced by all staff working across our health and social care sectors at this difficult time, but it is crucial that we continue to protect people's fundamental human rights. It would be completely unacceptable to abandon these rights in favour of taking blanket, discriminatory decisions.

It is also crucial that governments and health services across our four nations carefully consider the ways they can provide stronger leadership and guidance – to ensure that people's rights are upheld and communication with vulnerable people is handled in a far more sensitive way to avoid further worry and upset as we navigate the difficult path ahead of us.

(1) See for example

Coronavirus: GP surgery apology over 'do not resuscitate' form - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-52117814>
(<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-52117814>)

Coronavirus: Care workers 'shocked' by virus treatment guidance - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-52155359>
(<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-52155359>)

Eddie Lynch, Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland

Caroline Abrahams, Charity Director Age-UK
Deborah Alsina, Chief Executive Independent Age
Jane Ashcroft, Chief Executive Anchor Hanover
Helena Herklots, Commissioner for Older People In Wales
Victoria Lloyd, Chief Executive Age Cymru
Donald Macaskill, Chief Executive Care Scotland
Linda Robinson, Chief Executive Age Northern Ireland
Brian Sloan, Chief Executive Age Scotland

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