

Patient & Family Resources

Information to Help You and Your Family Make Important Healthcare Decisions.

Critical Care Glossary

A

Advance directive

Instructions to family, friends, physicians and others which describe a person's preferences for medical treatment, should they become incapacitated. Advance directives include living wills, durable power of attorney (for health care) and the assignment of surrogate decision-makers to make decisions on the patient's behalf.

Attending physician

The primary physician who is ultimately responsible for the decisions made about the care of the patient.

C

Critical Care

The specialized medical and nursing care provided to patients facing an immediate life-threatening illness or injury.

Critical care continuum

The series of events that begins when the critically ill or injured patient first receives treatment, is transported and stabilized, is hospitalized and recovers from their illness or injury.

Critical Care Pharmacologist

Doctors of medicine or pharmacology who work with other members of the critical care team to prescribe and monitor the drugs needed by the patient.

Critical care unit (CCU)

A location in the hospital where critical care is provided. Frequently referred to as the intensive care unit (ICU).

Critical care team

The multidisciplinary team of health care professionals who care for critically ill and injured patients. The critical care team includes the critical care Intensivist, critical care nurse, respiratory therapist and pharmacologist. Other allied health therapists and technicians, social workers and clergy may also participate as members of the critical care team

D

Do-Not Resuscitate (DNR) Order

An order which, when written on a patient's chart, instructs physicians and nurses to not attempt to re-start the patient's failed heartbeat or respiration, but will keep the patient comfortable.

Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care

The legal document which gives another person – a surrogate decision-maker – the authority to make health care decisions on behalf of a patient when the patient is unable to do so for themselves.

E

Endotracheal tube

A tube inserted through the mouth or nose to assist with breathing.

F

Four Primary medical specialties in critical care

Anesthesia, internal medicine, pediatrics and surgery.

I

Intensive care unit – synonymous with the critical care unit

Informed Consent

The process that occurs when patients are informed about the alternatives for medical treatment that are available to them and are asked to decide which, if any, of the treatments they would like to receive.

Intensivist

A critical care physician whose medical practice is focused entirely on the care of critically ill and injured patients.

Interdisciplinary

The coordinated efforts of several disciplines to achieve a common goal.

L

Life support

Treatment that includes mechanical ventilation, administration of nutrition and hydration, support of the heart and other interventions to sustain a patient's life.

Living will

A document that requests no life-support treatment be provided to a patient. It is the patient's responsibility to notify family and physician of the existence of a living will.

R

Respirator/ventilator

A machine that is attached to a breathing tube to deliver oxygen to a patient's lungs to assist with the breathing process.

Respiratory therapist

A health care practitioner who is specially educated and experienced in caring for patients who have breathing problems requiring respirators or ventilators to help them breathe.

S

Sepsis/Septic Shock

Overwhelming infection that causes organs, tissues, and blood vessels to work poorly.

T

Tracheostomy tube

A tube inserted in the neck to assist with breathing.

Triage

The medical assessment of the urgency of a patient's illness or injury that determines their priority for treatment.

Tube feeding

The process whereby patients are provided with nourishment and hydration by tubes placed in the nose, vein or stomach.