

Surgical Resident Training Program

One of the most important, yet most difficult conversations for a physician is telling a family that their loved one has died. This conversation is compounded when the patient is pronounced dead on neurologic criteria (brain dead). It is also known that a family's understanding of brain death has a direct impact on their consent to organ donation.

Strengthening end-of-life communication skills of physicians could potentially improve a family's experience and organ donation rates.

“Interpersonal & Communication Skills” is among the six (6) competencies stressed as a critical skill by the American College of Graduate Medical Education for residents.

Due to the extreme sensitivity surrounding the end of a patient's life, experts recommend the following techniques for physicians when interacting with family members:

- Actively listen with cultural, ethnic, gender, racial and religious sensitivity
- Accurately and effectively communicate information to the healthcare team to ensure continuity of care
- Share information regarding adverse events and changes in conditions of patients with other members of the healthcare team in a timely and effective fashion
- *Minimize the number of staff members who talk to families about brain death to avoid confusion*
- *Choose words carefully. Use simple language as opposed to clinical language*
- *Repeat and multiple explanations might be necessary*

I. OBJECTIVES

This training will provide residents with tools and resources to effectively communicate with grieving families in a concise and clear manner.

The simulation sessions allows the resident to immediately practice these skills on a family role player to determine strengths and weakness in his/her communication style.

By the end of this session participants will be able to demonstrate his/her ability to discuss end-of-life issues with family members of patients who have suffered non-recoverable neurologic injuries.

Surgical Resident Training Program

II. OVERVIEW OF THE TRAINING

1. A pre-training survey will be completed by all participating residents (both a paper version and a web-based survey are available).
2. Gift of Life staff will deliver a didactic presentation on brain death declaration and key factors in explaining brain death to grieving families. Emphasis will be placed on understanding expressions of grief.
3. Gift of Life staff will demonstrate an effective conversation with a grieving family member.
4. Residents will participate in a simulated end-of-life conversation with a role-player.
5. Residents will receive immediate feedback from Gift of Life staff members who observe and participate in the simulation.
6. A post-training assessment will be completed at the completion of the training session.

III. EQUIPMENT AND SPACIAL REQUIREMENTS

1. A dedicated block of time (typically 2.5 – 3.5 hours) for resident participation.
 - a. This training may be divided between two concurrent days. In the event the training is split the didactic presentation and demonstration will be conducted on day 1 allowing the simulations to occur on day 2.
2. A conference room equipped with a laptop and projector for didactic presentation.
3. Simulation exam rooms or designated quiet rooms for role-playing.
 - a. Video recording is permitted but not mandatory.
4. Props such as CT scan, X-ray, Cerebral blood flow study (Gift of Life will provide)

Surgical Resident Training Program

IV. MATERIALS

Each resident will be provided a folder of materials to include (but not limited to):

1. Agenda
2. Demonstration Scenario
3. Simulation Scenario
4. Copies of the hospital's policies for Determination of Brain Death and Organ & Tissue Donation (Anatomical Gift)
5. Articles focused on:
 - a. Explaining Brain Death
 - b. Care of the Potential Organ Donor
 - c. Levothyroxine (T4) Protocol – Endocrine changes in brain dead patients
6. Post Training Assessment and Evaluation

The data from the pre-survey and post-training assessment will be compiled by Gift of Life and reported to hospital leadership.

V. SUGGESTED READINGS/RESOURCES

Gift of Life Donor Program website: <http://www.donors1.org/>

Alvarez, GF; Kirby, AS. The perspective of families of the critically ill patient: their needs [Ethical, legal and organizational issues in the intensive care unit]. *Current Opinion in Critical Care*; Volume 12(6), December 2006

Franz, et al. Explaining brain death: a critical feature of the donation process. *Journal of Transplant Coordination*, March 1997

Gortmaker, et.al. Improving the Request Process to Increase Family Consent for Organ Donation. *Journal of Transplant Coordination*, 1998

Maloney, R., Wolfelt, A.D. *Caring for Donor Families Before, During and After*. Ft. Collins, CO: Companion Press, 2001.