

Ways in which you can build agreement on treatment or care decisions

The following approaches are possible avenues for resolving disagreements in the end-of-life care setting. Not all options will be available in all clinical contexts. However, the simple approaches should be taken first.

- **Time and repeat discussion**
Unless decisions about life-sustaining treatment need to be made urgently, giving families time to come to terms with the impending death of the patient and to seek further discussion with family or others providing support may be sufficient to resolve outstanding issues.
- **Second medical opinion**
A request for a second medical opinion may be raised with, or directed to, any member of the treating team. Offering a second opinion may also be appropriate if the family are displaying anxieties or uncertainties regarding diagnosis or prognosis. It is the responsibility of the senior treating clinician to facilitate any second medical opinion. This opinion should be from a health professional with relevant expertise in the patient's condition and who is demonstrably independent from the treating team.
- **Time limited treatment trial**
Such a course of action may be undertaken to clarify prognostic uncertainty or resolve disagreement about prognosis, provided the trial is in the best interests of the patient. It may be advisable to clarify with the treating team and family what treatments are being commenced or continued, the criteria for assessment and the timeframe for review before possible continuation or withdrawal.
- **Facilitation**
Involvement of a third party may assist in clarifying and addressing the concerns of the patient and/or family members, or in finding agreement where an impasse has occurred between the family and the treating team. The third party may be a senior member of the hospital administration, a senior health professional, or another person agreed upon by those involved. The person should have sufficient seniority, be respected by all parties, and be demonstrably independent of the treating team.
- **Patient transfer**
When the above steps have not resolved the situation, the practicality of transferring the care of the patient to another institution or another suitable treating clinician within the same institution should be investigated with those involved.

References:

NSW Guidelines – End of Life Care and Decision Making (March 2005)
http://www0.health.nsw.gov.au/policies/gj/2005/pdf/GL2005_057.pdf