

Death with Dignity

History

- Terminal illness
- Hospice care
- POLST or DNR
- Death with Dignity attestation

Signs and Symptoms

- AMS
- Congestion
- Change in breathing
- Change in pulse
- Fever

Differential

- Natural end of life
- Medication OD

EMS may be summoned by family for a patient who has taken a lethal dose of medication under the Death with Dignity Act.

Respect the patient's wishes, but if family objects and requests intervention or transport, initiate comfort care.

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Review POLST, DNR, or Death with Dignity Final Attestation form *(if present)*. Honor wishes listed on legal form

No

DNR/POLST present and family objects

Yes

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If needed, provide comfort care to include:

- Oxygen
 - Open and maintain the airway using non-invasive means only (e.g. chin lift or jaw thrust)
 - Suction as necessary
- Do not start resuscitation if the patient is in cardiopulmonary arrest

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Provide comfort care and contact the Base Hospital to have physician speak with family.

Do not start resuscitation if the patient is in cardiopulmonary arrest



Contact Base Hospital for medical direction, as needed.



Pearls

- Patients who have been deemed terminally ill by two independent physicians have the right under the California End of Life Act to end their life with dignity at a time that they choose themselves. EMS personnel should be aware of and familiar with this act. Refer to Policy 1003 for additional information.
- Naxolone will not have an affect on the drugs prescribed for death with dignity patients and is not advised.
- It is important to recognize that families may be educated on what to expect with a dying family member, but no amount of preparation can eliminate the stress and grief of watching a loved one die.
- Contact the Base Hospital for direction or assistance with family if necessary.

