

Ethical Decision-making Framework for Tube Feeding Options

Site Applicability

All VCH Sites

Practice Level

All Health Care Professions involved in supporting decisions about tube feeding options.

Need to Know

Eating and drinking by mouth are sometimes difficult or impossible due to a person's medical condition.

Tube feeding is a common form of nutritional support in such situations. It can be used as a short-term measure, where the expectation is that the patient/client/resident (person) will eventually be able to resume adequate oral nutrition in the future. Tube feeding may also be used as a long-term, life-sustaining measure, where there is no expectation that the person will ever be independent of it.

Decisions about providing, withholding or withdrawing tube feeding are ethically significant and sensitive.

In light of this, it is important to have a framework to help support decision-making.

Guideline

VCH Ethics Service has prepared an Ethical Decision-making Framework to help support Clinicians have discussions and to make decisions around tube feeding options. Refer to:

[Ethical Decision-making Framework for Tube Feeding Options](#)

Documentation

All discussions and decisions will be documented in the appropriate section of person's chart.

Related Documents

- [VCH Consent Guidelines CA 1000, Clinical Administrative, November 8, 2004](#)
- [VCH Ethical Decision-making Framework \(March 2012\)](#)
- [VCH Indigenous Cultural Safety Policy](#)
- <https://one.vch.ca/dept-project/Client-Relations-and-Risk-Management/Documents/Resolution-of-disputes-care-not-considered-beneficial.pdf> Resolution of Disagreements about Expectations for Care Considered Non-beneficial. VCH Risk Management Bulletin Issues: November 12, 2004, revised May, 2021.
- [Resolution of Objections to Decisions made by Authorized Substitute Decision Makers. VCH Risk Management Bulletin Issued: November 12, 2004 \(From VCH Guidelines to Special Consent Situations\)](#)
- [Patients Property Act](#)
- [Representation Agreement Act](#)
- [Health Care \(Consent\) and Care Facility \(Admission\) Act](#)

References

- (1) Cardenas, Diana, Correia, Maria, Ochoa, Juan et al (2021). Clinical Nutrition and Human Rights. An International Position Paper. *Nutrition in Clinical Practice and Clinical Nutrition*, 36:534-544.
- (2) Schwartz, Denise, Barrocas, Albert, Annetta, Maria et al (2021) Ethical Aspects of Artificially Administered Nutrition and Hydration: An ASPEN Position Paper. *Nutrition in Clinical Practice* 36(2):254-267.
- (3) King, PC, Barrimore, SE, Pulle, RC, Bell, JJ (2019). "I Wouldn't Ever Want It": A Qualitative Evaluation of Patient and Caregiver Perceptions Toward Enteral Tube Feeding in Hip Fracture Inpatients. *Journal of Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition*, 43(6):626-33.

First Released Date:	10-AUG-2022
Posted Date:	10-AUG-2022
Last Revised:	28-JULY-2022
Last Reviewed:	28-JULY-2022
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