POLICY:

General Statement:

King County Public Hospital District #2 d/b/a Evergreen Healthcare will allow its health care providers to participate in the process set forth in RCW 70.245 (the “Death with Dignity Act,” herein referred to as the “Act”) if they so choose, subject to the provisions of this and any other applicable hospital policies. This means that health care providers (as defined by the Act) who are employed and properly credentialed by Evergreen Healthcare may, as otherwise allowed:

- Perform the duties of an attending physician;
- Perform the duties of a consulting physician;
- Prescribe a life-ending dose of medication;
- Dispense a prescription for a life-ending dose of medication;
- Provide counseling in connection with the provision of a life-ending dose of medication; and/or
- Perform other duties as provided for in the Act.

Ingestion of a Lethal Dose of Medication:

Patients may not ingest a lethal dose of medication while on the premises of any Evergreen Healthcare Facility. “Facility” here means the Evergreen Hospital Medical Center, the Gene and Irene Wockner Hospice, and Evergreen Healthcare’s medical clinics which include, but are not necessarily limited to, the Evergreen Medical Group and the Senior Clinic.

Notification:

If any Evergreen Healthcare health care provider participates in the process allowed by the Act, that person must immediately notify the Evergreen Healthcare Vice President of Medical Affairs or his/her authorized designee.

Documentation and Reporting:

It is the health care provider’s responsibility to comply with all procedures and requirements of the Act and applicable Evergreen Healthcare policies. This includes, but is not limited to, preparing and completing all documentation required by and in accordance with the Act and applicable Evergreen Healthcare policies. The steps included in the attached checklist shall be followed carefully and documented appropriately.

Evergreen Healthcare administration may, as deemed necessary and appropriate in its judgment, provide oversight and review records to determine whether all safeguards of the Act have been followed and that the required documentation is completed correctly and submitted to the Department of Health.

Health Care Provider Participation:

Evergreen Healthcare does not and shall not require or encourage any health care provider, whether an employee of or credentialed by an entity of Evergreen Healthcare, to participate in the process allowed by the Act. Only those health care providers who are willing to and desire to participate in the process should do so.

Any physician who agrees to serve as the Attending Physician may obtain consultation from any physician who agrees to serve as a Consulting Physician. Attending physicians are encouraged to consult with the Evergreen Palliative Care Consultation Service. Physician(s) who are part of the Evergreen Palliative Care Consultation Service may serve as a Consulting Physician under the Act.

Evergreen Healthcare does not and shall not require that any Evergreen Healthcare employee caring for patients in any setting, including but not limited to private homes, adult family homes, assisted living facilities, or skilled nursing facilities, be present for patient self-administration of a life-ending dose of medication. If a patient requests the presence of an Evergreen Healthcare employee during self-administration of a life-ending dose of medication under the Act and at a place other than an Evergreen Healthcare Facility, and such employee is willing to be present, then such employee may be present.
Evergreen Healthcare health care providers must always comply with the appropriate and applicable standard of care, including that which may apply to the process under the Act. All health care providers at Evergreen Healthcare are expected to appropriately respond to any patient’s query about life-ending dosages of medication with clarity and compassion. Evergreen Healthcare believes that its health care providers have an obligation to openly discuss each patient’s concerns, needs, feelings, and desires about the dying process. Health care providers should seek to learn the meaning behind a patient’s questions and to help the patient understand the range of available options in end-of-life care, including but not limited to, aggressive management of pain and non-pain symptoms, voluntary cessation of nutrition and hydration, and palliative sedation. Hospice care should be considered and offered to any patient who is terminally ill. Ultimately, Evergreen Healthcare’s goal is to help patients make informed decisions about end-of-life care in the context of a physician-patient relationship in which the privacy and dignity of each patient is accorded the highest regard.

Laws/Regulations:

- WAC 246-978 Death with Dignity Act Requirements
- RCW 70.245 The Washington Death with Dignity Act

Reference Materials:

- Washington State Department of Health Frequently Asked Questions
- Death with Dignity Act Forms
  - Request for Medication to End My Life in a Humane and Dignified Manner
  - Attending Physician’s Compliance Form
  - Consulting Physician’s Compliance Form
  - Psychiatric/Psychological Consultant’s Compliance Form
  - Pharmacy Dispensing Record
  - Attending Physician’s After Death Reporting Form
- The Oregon Death with Dignity Act: A Guidebook for Health Care Professionals

Referenced Documents

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Documents which reference this document

- EHCS Death with Dignity Act Procedure - Hospice
- Response to Suicide Threat

Signed by

(03/19/2009) Mitch Weinberg, M.D., PhD, Vice President of Medical Affairs
(03/19/2009) Steven E Brown, FACHE, CEO
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