

The Next of Kin Education Project



What is the Education Project?

Presented By

The Next of Kin Education Project

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*NOKEP is a project of NOKR, Inc. a 501c3, A Public Benefit Organization

background



The Education Project

What is NOKEP?

Why the effort began

MISSION STATEMENT

The Next of Kin Education Project is a non-profit effort* dedicated to increasing patient care and safety in hospitals nationwide by giving their patient care staffs the tools they need to locate an unconscious patient's emergency contact information, perform next of kin notifications and obtain informed consent, quickly and easily.

ONE FAMILY'S STORY

When accidents or sudden illness occur, anyone can find him or herself in need of emergency care.

In this country, tens of millions of people find themselves in the emergency room every year, and of those, nearly a million arrive unconscious, and millions more in critical condition.

That's exactly what happened to Elaine Sullivan.

A very active 71 year old woman, Elaine fell at home while getting into the bathtub. When paramedics arrived, they realized that injuries to her mouth and head had made her unable to communicate, or as the hospital later discovered, to give informed consent for her own care.

Although stable for the first few days, she began to slip into critical condition. On the seventh day, Elaine died.

That tragedy was soon overshadowed by another.



Despite having her daughter's contact information right on her chart, the hospital failed to notify her family that she'd been hospitalized, for six days, just hours before she died...

Despite having her daughter's contact information clearly indicated on the front of her chart, the hospital failed to notify her family that she'd been hospitalized until six days later. Finally the call was made hours before she died, unnecessarily alone.

Elaine Sullivan was my mother.

When my daughter Laura and I found out how long she had actually been hospitalized, our grief turned to action. Through research, we discovered something unbelievable. There wasn't one Illinois, California or federal regulation that said a hospital must contact a patient's family, even if the patient is unconscious or unable to communicate. In my mother's case that simple act would have saved her life.

If her hospital had called us the first few days, we not only would have had the time to fly back to Chicago to be there with her, but we would have been able to make sure that she received the care she needed. We also would have been able to give the physicians treating her, the medical and prescription drug history that would have prevented the drug interactions and negligence that were responsible for her death.

Soon, we began to hear similar stories from around the country:

- A mother from Atlanta whose son had become ill out of state. Despite handing emergency personnel his mother's contact information while still conscious, the hospital failed to notify his family of his hospitalization or death. The family finally found his body in the coroner's office two months later. He'd been cremated.
- An Illinois man who was critically injured in a car accident on the way home from work. It took his family over a week to locate him in a local hospital morgue.
- A physician who was brought into his own hospital, yet he was tagged as a "John Doe" and his family wasn't notified for five days.
- An Indiana man who died in an accident, two miles away from his mother's house. Even though he had ID and her contact information, she wasn't notified until he died two days later.

background



The Education Project

Why was the project created?

Protecting the community

How you can help

THE FIRST STEP...

So we partnered with Legislators in California and Illinois to create The Next of Kin Law. Recently enacted, the law simply states that a hospital must make reasonable efforts to contact the next of kin of patients who come into a hospital unconscious or physically unable to give informed consent, within 24 hours of admission.

The federal version, is being introduced into the House of Representatives.

WHY WAS THE NEXT OF KIN EDUCATION PROJECT CREATED?

As soon as the state laws were enacted, hospitals across the country started hearing about our story and began asking for simple, concrete methods to perform NOK notifications quickly and easily. Ways to keep those kinds of tragedies from happening in their own facilities. To answer that need, we gathered medical professionals nationwide, to help us create the Seven Steps Information Kit.

Filled with tools and articles written by top clinical experts, that will give hospitals the background and materials they need to train their nurses and physicians to perform next of kin notifications quickly and easily in every situation.

It includes our Seven Steps to Successful Notification System, training tools and chart pages that hospitals can adapt for use in their patient's charts.



The Information Kit is designed to promote patient health, safety and satisfaction, while helping hospitals reduce their own legal and malpractice liability.

In this first year alone, we distributed a free copy of the kit to nearly 100,000 key hospital executives nationwide.

Protecting Our Communities

Even though the Seven Steps tools will protect every unconscious patient who is brought into an emergency room, our Project is specially designed to have a vital impact in two underserved communities -- senior citizens and the economically disadvantaged.

Not only are uninsured patients or patients without regular medical care more likely to become suddenly or seriously ill, they may also have situations that, if not handled correctly, can make NOK notification difficult.

The Project will help hospitals nationwide bridge that gap and better serve their community. In an emergency it's VITAL to have the people we love and trust around us, when we cannot make decisions on our own. In a nutshell, that is what NOK is all about - families being allowed to take care of the people they love.

The Safer Family Action Plan

One of the factors that contributed to Elaine's death, was the fact that the doctors didn't have her medical history. Through this, we found out first hand how critical having that information instantly available can be.

The past few years, with hurricanes, terrorism, tsunamis and earthquakes, it's more necessary than ever for families to have an easy-to-use action plan for safeguarding their emergency contacts. Families need to condense their emergency medical information and vital documents into a format that they can grab and take with them at a moment's notice.

We created the Safer Family Action Plan to do just that. The Action Plan is being distributed nationwide via our web site, giveaways and media coverage, including the "Chicago Tribune", UPI and the "New York Times".

In fact the Safer Family Action Plan was the only emergency resource chosen by NBC to be featured on their miniseries "10.5 Apocalypse", website as a way for their viewers to prepare themselves for any emergency.

To continue our progress we need your help to meet the Project's funding goal. To help, visit our Donation page at www.nokep.org.

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