

20. End of Life Care (Purple Thistle) Sign Procedure

Purpose of this procedure:

To provide guidance for staff on use of the End of Life Care (Purple Thistle) Sign when a patient is imminently dying or has died.

The Procedure:

The procedure includes a step-by-step guide including:

1. Use of the End of Life Care (Purple Thistle) Sign as a communication tool.
2. Special considerations and consent.
3. Preparing to implement the Purple Thistle Sign in your area.
4. Operational procedure for using the Purple Thistle Sign.

1. Use of the End of Life Care (Purple Thistle) Sign as a communication tool

The End of Life Care (Purple Thistle) Sign is a communication tool which can be used to promote dignified, respectful and compassionate care when a patient is imminently dying or has died. Using a simple visual indicator to raise awareness of this profound event can enable staff to interact appropriately with those affected by the death and help to create a calm and dignified environment (Duffin, 2011).

The purple thistle image is taken from the 'When Someone Has Died' bereavement booklet that should be offered to all families following a death in NHS Lothian.

Copyright of the purple thistle image belongs to NHS Education for Scotland (NES). NHS Lothian has obtained permission to use the thistle image as our End of Life Care Sign, however this is subject to certain restrictions. Therefore the sign must not be adapted, embellished or otherwise changed or added to without first checking with the NHS Lothian Bereavement Service whether the proposed change is in line with our agreement with NES. Should you wish to adapt the sign (e.g. by adding text which may be relevant to your area), please contact the Bereavement Service for advice: bereavement.service@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk.



2. Special considerations and consent

The End of Life Care (Purple Thistle) Sign should only be used in the circumstances when a patient is **imminently** dying or has died. Other uses may dilute the impact of the sign and undermine its purpose.

The sign is intended to be a visual communication tool and is not a substitute for sensitive and honest conversations. However it may not suit all clinical areas or indeed all dying patients and their families, therefore its use may vary from one clinical area to another.

It is essential that staff explain to the patient and/or their family (as appropriate) the purpose of the sign and its value in creating a dignified and supportive environment for end of life care. Patients and families should be assured that is simply a way to promote awareness and help staff to provide better care. The outcome of this conversation must be clearly documented in the patient's healthcare records. If the dying patient or their family have any concerns or objections then their views and wishes must be respected.

If a patient is imminently dying or a death has occurred in an area where other patients are present, it may be appropriate for the nurse to sensitively inform them of the situation. It is important to offer support and reassurance, to allay any fears and misconceptions.

3. Preparing to implement the End of Life Care (Purple Thistle) Sign in your area

Prior to implementing the End of Life Care (Purple Thistle) Sign in a clinical area, there must be agreement within the ward team about how, when and where it will be used. When the decision has been made to implement the End of Life Care (Purple Thistle) Sign, the sign can be downloaded from [Policy Online](#). It must be printed in colour and laminated prior to use.

The Senior Charge Nurse must communicate the purpose of the sign with colleagues and wider team members who may visit the clinical area (including medical, nursing, CSWs, AHPs, bank staff, administrative, portering or domestic staff). This is to ensure that everyone is aware of its use and the meaning of the sign.

Appropriate locations to display the sign will vary depending on local facilities and the layout of the clinical area. The Senior Charge Nurse should confirm the locations where the sign is to be displayed (e.g. entrance to ward, outside patient's room or bed space, relatives' room). The Senior Charge Nurse should identify where it is to be stored when not in use, so that it is readily available when required.

4. Operational procedure for using the End of Life Care (Purple Thistle) Sign

PROCEDURE		
4.1	<p>Consent MUST be obtained from the patient / family before being displayed.</p> <p>If consent given, continue with rest of the procedure.</p> <p>If consent NOT given then their wishes must be respected and the sign not used.</p> <p>The conversation MUST be clearly documented in the patient's healthcare record.</p>	It is important that patients / families are appropriately informed and consulted.
4.2	The sign should be displayed when a patient is imminently dying or has died in your clinical area. It should be displayed at agreed place(s).	To ensure that staff are aware of the situation. Awareness of this profound event allows staff to interact appropriately with those affected by the death.
4.3	If a patient is imminently dying or a death has occurred in an area where other patients are present, it may be appropriate for the nurse to sensitively inform them of the situation.	It is important to offer support and reassurance, to allay any fears and misconceptions.
4.4	When staff notice the sign they should be conscious of maintaining a calm and respectful atmosphere, e.g. keep noise to a minimum, avoid mobile phone use and should only enter the room / bed space to offer care and support to the patient and family.	To ensure privacy, to promote a calm, caring environment and to prevent any unnecessary interruptions, in particular during sensitive conversations with family or during the final act of care.
4.5	Once the bereaved family has left the clinical area and the deceased patient has been transferred to the mortuary, remove the sign and return to the agreed storage area.	<p>To ensure it is ready for next use.</p> <p>It's important that the sign is only displayed at appropriate times, so that its impact is not compromised.</p>

Associated materials/references:

- [End of Life Care \(Purple Thistle\) Sign](#)
- [Death in Hospital Policy & Procedures](#)
- Duffin, C (2011) Silent Order: encouraging respect for bereaved families. *Emergency Nurse*. 19, 5, 9