

AFFIRM/ACT

It is best in this scenario to advocate for the patient to come off of ecmo. Due to the patient being on ecmo for over 100 days and having no chance of recovery without a new set of lungs it is best to end their suffering. This means taking the problem to the ethics board. Although the family will lose their loved one it is our job to not let our patients suffer. This patient has to be heavily sedated in order to keep them even slightly comfortable while a machine breaths and works their heart for them.

MESSAGE

Patient is on ecmo and is steadily declining. Patient is able to get a transplant, but parents are refusing. Patient has almost no chance of recovery but is still on ecmo. They have been on ecmo for over 100 days and have to stay heavily sedated in order to be kept comfortable. The decision must be made do we take the patient off ecmo or keep them on? The legal factors are that without a court order the hospital cannot take the patient off of ecmo without the parents consent.

REVIEW

Non-maleficence- in this case if the patient stays on ecmo they will continue to decline. They will continually have to be sedated around the clock in order for them to stay comfortable and for the ecmo to be allowed to work

beneficence- the goal in this dilemma is to do what is best for the patient and their health.

justice- the goal is to give the patient fair and morally acceptable treatment. Even if that means going through the legal channel.

futility- in this dilemma we do not want to give the patient any treatment that is not going to benefit them.

2.1 Primary commitment to Recipients of Nursing Care- we have a commitment as nurses to care for our patients to the fullest extent of our ability

3.2 Advocating for Persons who Receive Nursing Care- as nurses it is our job to advocate for the rights and treatment of our patients.
(2025 code of ethics provisions)

ETHICAL DILEMMA

LOOK BACK

I learned how long of a process the legal battle is for the hospital to fight for decision making ability over a patient. Although I always want what is best for the patient it is hard to see the pain a family goes through when they are fighting for what they feel is best for their family, especially when it is their own child. It is even harder when that decision means the death of their child.

OPTIONS

1. Stay out of the decision.

Cons

- the family will make decision without input from the nurse
- this decision could be life altering for the patient
- not following the patients wishes

2. Advocate for the patient to come off of ecmo.

Cons

- may go against the families wishes
- would lead to the patients passing

Pros

- will end the patient's suffering

3. Advocate for the family to keep decision making power.

Cons

- patient will continue to suffer
- patient will not make a recovery
- patient will be in a vegetative state

Pros

- family will have their loved one alive

STAKEHOLDERS

- Patient- does not have a say, but is affected
- Nurse- is to educate the family on all available options. Wants to have the child taken off of ecmo.
- Physician- educated and help inform the family of the decisions and what they all mean. Wishes to have the patient taken off of ecmo.
- Ethics Committee- helps to decide if the decision needs to be taken to court to let the hospital have the decision making capabilities. Wants the child to be comfortable and have what is best for them.
- Family- has decision making power and wishes to keep their child on ecmo
- Attorney- fights for their client and their stance in the case whether that is the parents keeping decision power or the hospital fighting for the power to make the decision
- Judge- wants what's best for the child and will decide who gets decision making power based off of the facts

Resources

2025 code of ethics provisions. American Nurses Association. (n.d.). <https://codeofethics.ana.org/provisions>

Kon, A. (2024, December). Point: Is it ethically justifiable to withdraw extracorporeal Membrane Oxygenation Against the Wishes of a Patient With Decision-Making Capacity When Cure Is Not Possible? Yes. Chest Journal. [https://journal.chestnet.org/article/S0012-3692\(24\)05042-6/pdf](https://journal.chestnet.org/article/S0012-3692(24)05042-6/pdf)

Makram, A., Elsheikh, R., Phuong Ha, T. T., Mohammed, M., & Tien Huy, N. (2025, October 14). Ethical Dilemmas Surrounding ECMO Withdrawal: A Qualitative Empirical Study. Wiley Online Library. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/jep.70294?casa_token=8wWXYVb_rWsAAAAA%3A1NMNZEIRuxUIdANTyrgVyWbOxy_QmkhIr1xT-J8F3-cKr6f-vQvrfBLz8ba_z1FrMzsXy06vkP-p4rQ

