

# MailOnline

## Grandfather dies in agony because hospital ignored signed declaration stating he didn't want to be revived

By [James Tozer](#)

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Hospital chiefs have apologised to the family of a terminally-ill grandfather who died in agony after staff tried to keep him alive against his wishes.

Arthur Johnson, 64, had signed 'do not resuscitate' forms instructing medics not to revive him if his heart stopped.

But after he was rushed to hospital, his relatives were horrified to find a full crash team fighting to keep him alive.



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**Grandfather: Arthur Johnson's family have lodged a complaint against the University Hospital of North Staffordshire over his death**

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Today they told how his final hours had been spent in agony and demanded to know why the request - authorised by Mr Johnson's GP - was not adhered to.

The hospital which mistakenly tried to save Mr Johnson's life could now find itself facing legal action as a result.

The case further highlights the increasingly contentious issue of whether terminally-ill patients have a right to die in the manner of their choosing.

Widower Mr Johnson, a retired pottery industry worker, had decided he didn't want invasive medical treatment earlier this year after being told his chest and heart conditions were terminal.

The father-of-five signed a 'do not resuscitate' (DNR) document countersigned by his GP and a community matron and wrote farewell letters to his family in Stoke-on-Trent, anticipating a peaceful death.

After his condition deteriorated and he was moved from the local Douglas Macmillan Hospice to University Hospital of North Staffordshire, relatives passed the form to nursing staff.



But his wishes were ignored when he went into cardiac arrest, and family members arrived to find medics crowding around fighting to keep him alive.

'When we saw the crash team round him, we were horrified,' said his daughter and carer Tammy Craggs, 27.

'We said he was a DNR patient and a doctor immediately pulled back from the bed.'

Now the family are demanding answers from the hospital as to why his wishes were not respected.



'He spent his last three hours in great pain,' said Mrs Craggs. 'He was choking and when I tried to give him a hug he cried out in agony.'

'It was terrible to see dad like that and it would have been avoided if they had just given him pain relief and he had gone peacefully.'

'Why the DNR form wasn't passed to the doctors on his last day is a mystery. If they had carried out his request, I'm sure he would not have suffered.'

A post mortem examination found Mr Johnson died of emphysema and confirmed that a 'successful' resuscitation attempt had taken place.

The family are now thought to be considering legal action against the hospital.

'This is a legally-binding document so I feel it is a very serious breach of my dad's rights,' his daughter said.

Mr Johnson, who had 12 grandchildren, had worked in the pottery industry for 40 years.

Stoke-on-Trent South MP Rob Ffello, who is supporting the family, said: 'If a mistake like this can be made, what would happen if it was the other way round and someone needing resuscitation did not get it?'

'The hospital must give assurances on the whole question of DNRs.'

Last night the hospital trust refused to discuss what investigations it was carrying out into the blunder.

But a spokesman said: 'We have met Mr Johnson's family twice to discuss their concerns and have apologised to them.'

Government guidelines state that patients' wishes should be taken into account, even at the point of death.

Some parts of the country - including London - now have databases formally recording terminally-ill patients' wishes about whether they would want to be resuscitated.

The British Medical Association and the now-merged Age Concern and Help the Aged both back such schemes, but pro-life groups say it violates the sanctity of life and amounts to a slippery slope to euthanasia.

Mr Johnson signed the DNR form last November after becoming fed up with frequent hospital stays caused by chest infections, his family said.

They were told to present it whenever he required medical attention, which they did when he was moved to North Staffordshire Hospital on January 12.

But five days later they were informed he had taken a turn for the worse, only to find him being resuscitated.

'He wanted to spend his last days peacefully back at the hospice, but instead he spent his final few hours in pain in a hospital bed,' said Mrs Craggs, a mother-of-two. 'We want to know why.'

The family are considering legal action.

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I am the daughter of Mr Johnson ..... Please, we only want the hospital investigated as the week that my dad was in hospital there were a lot of errors made. We have not had a full apology; we were only told they underestimated our medical knowledge. They resuscitated my dad only to let him suffocate for three hours and he was in a lot of pain. It was horrible to see .... from a distraught daughter.

- tracey foster, stoke on trent, 10/6/2010 18:46

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It was all done in good faith. No more action is required except to caution Hospital staff to be more vigilant in these DNR cases.

- Humayun Sadiq, Lahore Pakistan, 10/6/2010 17:18

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What about situations where people DO want to be resuscitated and someone comes along with a forged letter stating they

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do NOT want to be??. You know people can't be trusted, particularly where money etc is concerned.

- Sharon, Oldham, England, 10/6/2010 16:38

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although i completely empathise with this mans family i do not however think that suing the hospital will do any good just take away more money needed to be put into the NHS and money won't bring the man back nor take away the pain he felt

- Kate field, Leeds, 10/6/2010 16:31

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It is terribly sad and someone obviously dropped the ball here. The wishes just weren't communicated to the ones who needed to know.

I can't help thinking that a piece of paper is a bad way to do it though. When there seems to be an emergency, I would NEVER want my doctor to leave me lying in cardiac arrest while he searches for my file and reads the notes. It's just not how things work.

One thing that emergency staff do notice is a bracelet. I would suggest anyone wanting a DNR order get themselves a medical bracelet clearly spelling it out. They work for diabetes and for allergies, so why not for DNR?

- Elisa, Helsinki, Finland, 10/6/2010 16:26

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My father had a terminal illness and did not want resuscitation .Wilst in hospital the DNR stands but when you leave it is no longer valid.My father was at home and collapsed twice and we had to call the paramedics we told them of our dads wishes but they said they would resuscitate if it happened basically leave the the 999 call till the last minute if his heart had stopped and then it would be too late when they arrived.There hands were tied and dad told them his express wishes too.The GP wouldnt do one either you cant win its hard enough when a person makes that decision let alone it can only be carried out in a hospital and has to be redone on re-admittance.

Dad died peacefully in his sleep and I thank God we didnt have to go through what that family did ,please take legal advise they took away your dads last wishes.

- Jane, Durham, 10/6/2010 16:12

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