

Decision-making in Australia and New Zealand about limiting or withdrawing treatment takes place in a consensual manner according to the prognosis, and patient and family choices.

Language used in end-of-life care should be sensitive to the needs and perceptions of patients and their families. Some words and phrases that have a technical meaning in medicine are best avoided if these retain other common-use meanings that are distressing to patients and families.

The terms 'limiting treatment' or 'withdrawing active treatment' rather than 'withdrawal of care' should be used when describing withdrawal of certain therapies or treatments. The words 'therapy', 'treatment' and 'care' are sometimes used interchangeably and inappropriately. Care is never withdrawn but treatment is changed. ICU staff should always make clear that care for the patient continues after active treatments are withdrawn and should describe in plain language what this will involve.

The likelihood of poor outcome should be addressed without using the terms 'futility' or 'medical futility'. Some hold the view that any treatment that prolongs life, even briefly or at any cost, has utility and cannot be described as 'futile'. In such circumstances, families may interpret the term 'futility' as implying that the treatment of the patient (and by extension, the patient), is pointless or not worthwhile.

The term 'comfort care' is useful to describe the objectives of end-of-life care. Comfort is a familiar and unambiguous concept in everyday experience and reinforces the explicit priorities of symptom control and comfort rather than cure. The term 'palliative care' is a technical medical term and therefore requires additional explanation if it is used. In the context of brain death, respectful care is continued but terms such as comfort care and palliative care should not be used.

Further information on appropriate language in the context of end-of-life care can be found in the ANZICS *Statement on care and decision-making at the end of life*.