

# Doctor didn't discuss do not resuscitate notice to avoid upset

By Daily Telegraph Reporter

A DOCTOR who placed a "do not resuscitate" notice on a patient without discussing it with him or his family told an inquest yesterday that she had wanted to avoid causing "unnecessary distress".

The widow of Michael Richardson, 66, accused doctors of "playing God" after discovering that the DNR notice had been placed on him without any consultation.

Yesterday, Dr Anna Blackburn, a consultant specialising in respiratory medicine at James Paget University Hospital in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, said she had made the decision when Mr Richardson was admitted on October 24 2013.

He had been ill for several years with the lung condition pulmonary fibrosis and Dr Blackburn felt he had little chance of surviving a cardiac arrest. Attempting to resuscitate him would have been "futile and cruel", she told the inquest in Norwich.

"I sat down and thought long and hard about it," Dr Blackburn said.

"We had discussed his condition, he cried and he seemed quite upset about how it would affect his wife.

"I felt bringing up resuscitation would be even more distressing for him."

Patient confidentiality meant that Dr Blackburn could not approach his family without first talking to him.

The inquest heard the hospital's policy at the time was that it was not necessary to discuss a DNR decision if it would be "unnecessarily burdensome" for the patient. This policy has since been changed following a 2014 Court of Appeal



**Michael Richardson, 66, died after being assessed by Dr Anna Blackburn**

ruling. It now states that patients should be involved in life-and-death resuscitation decisions unless to do so would cause them physical harm.

"If I was faced with Mr Richardson today, I would have that discussion," Dr Blackburn added.

Mr Richardson, a former metal polisher and gardener, died three days after being admitted to the hospital.

His widow, Janet, 66, of Great Yarmouth, challenged the doctor at the inquest, saying: "My husband had a lot to live for, even if it was for another week. I'm sorry, your decision was very, very wrong."

The Court of Appeal ruled on life-and-death resuscitation decisions nine months after Mr Richardson's death.

Considering the case of Janet Tracey, 62, who died at Cambridge's Addenbrooke's Hospital in 2011 after an order was placed on her notes without proper consultation, Lord Dyson said there should be a "presumption in favour of patient involvement" unless there were genuinely "convincing reasons" not to.

He added that even well-intentioned

attempts to spare patients "distress" were not in themselves enough to justify keeping them in the dark.

Yesterday, hospital staff described how they had initially rushed to save Mr Richardson after he suffered a cardiac arrest. But they stopped when the DNR notice was brought to their attention.

Giving evidence, Mrs Richardson said her husband tried to discharge himself the day before his death because he was concerned about the levels of oxygen he was being given.

"He said, 'I can't breathe, take me home - I can't stand it any more. They're trying to kill me,'" she told the inquest.

"I said, 'I love you,' and then he said he loved me too. That was the last time I saw him alive.

"I wish I'd bundled him up and taken him home because at least if he was going to die, he was going to die with some dignity."

The inquest heard that the family, which had recently moved to Norfolk from Deal, Kent, learnt of the DNR notice when they returned to the hospital to pick up Mr Richardson's death certificate four days after his death.

Asked by the assistant coroner David Osborne if she had given consent for the notice, Mrs Richardson said: "No, nothing at all."

She added: "I visited the hospital twice a day. There would have been loads of opportunities for staff to talk to me.

"If he had been asked about the DNR notice, he would have said no, I know that."

The inquest continues.