An integrative review of Do-Not-Resuscitate decisions in Korea*

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I. Introduction

End-of-life (EOL) decisions are often complex and difficult. These decisions may change the focus of intervention from aggressive life-sustaining treatment to measures designed to relieve symptoms and provide comfort. So it is necessary for health care providers to concern with providing care that facilitates the patient’s well-being.

In Korea, EOL decisions are made frequently and practically in a clinical setting and involve ethical and legal issues. Do-Not-Resuscitate (DNR) is the most popular type of EOL decision. 1) Most health care providers stated they have made DNR decisions in their practice. 2-4)

Since the landmark case called “Case of the Boramae Hospital” 5) has brought EOL issues to light in Korea, a proposal has been made to build up a social consensus and guidelines for EOL decision making in Korea. Although EOL decisions habitually have to be made in clinical settings, before the

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1) Kim S, Do-Not-Resuscitate (DNR) decision making in terminal patients, Korean Journal of Nursing Query 1999 : 8(2) : 10-20,
5) In 1997, the wife of a patient who underwent brain surgery at Boramae Hospital asked to stop further treatment due to the financial burden. A doctor allowed the patient to be discharged against medical advice and he died. In 1998, the court proclaimed it was illegal and found both doctor and the wife guilty of homicide.
landmark case, little discussion occurred and few guidelines were provided for health professionals on how such decisions should be made. Understanding phenomena associated with EOL decision making may help nurses get a better sense of how to care for patients and their families during this time.

Integrative review is a research review method through which one can combine both experimental and non-experimental research in order to more fully understand the phenomenon of concern.6–9 The purpose of this paper is to outline the research that has been conducted regarding DNR decisions in Korea and to describe the characteristics of DNR decision making in Korea using an integrative review of the literature. This paper may give insight into practice, research, and education regarding EOL decisions across the health care discipline in Korea.

II. Methods

As a method, an integrative review was performed to review the published research findings regarding DNR decisions in Korea and to synthesize the findings for future research. The procedure followed five steps suggested in the literature10,11: problem identification, literature search, data evaluation, data analysis, and data presentation.

1. Problem Identification

Regarding DNR decisions in Korea, two questions were posed: 1) what are the characteristics of the studies regarding DNR decision in Korea? 2) what are the characteristics of DNR decisions in Korea? Answering these questions may help the health care discipline to promote proper research in the future and improve practice after reflection on current phenomena regarding DNR in Korea.

2. Literature Search

Three Korean biomedical databases including KOREAMED (http://www.koreamed.org), KMBASE (http://kmbase.medric.or.kr), and RICH (http://www.richis.org) were used to search the literature. The key search term was DNR. Inclusion criteria were either original articles or review articles written in Korean and published in Korean journals from 1998 to 2010. Exclusion criteria were unpublished theses or conference proceedings. Other exclusion criteria were articles focused on cultural differences and those with research populations consisting of...