# Ethical decision-making for patients with End-Stage Kidney Disease during the COVID-19 crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic is placing unprecedented pressure on the NHS, including a major impact on the delivery of renal services across the UK.

The clinical workforce has difficult logistical, medical and ethical challenges at this time, and it is essential that clinical decisions made with and for our patients about their care are fair, reasonable, transparent and accountable. Clinical decision-making should continue to promote the long-standing ethical values we uphold in our regular daily clinical practice.

## Decisions about escalation of treatment

Any decisions about whether or not to escalate treatment must use consistent principles and should be based upon the best available evidence about likely outcomes. These decisions must also comply with the shared decision-making policies of the NHS. Therefore decisions should include the patient and their wishes (as much as is feasible for the given situation) and, wherever possible and appropriate, the patient's family and/or carers.

Difficult assessment decisions should be carried out by more than one senior clinician colleague, where feasible. Decisions to escalate treatment to intensive care should have input from intensive care doctors. All decisions must be well documented, to ensure accountability and for the legal protection of front-line staff.

**It is vitally important that the presence of End Stage Kidney Disease is not in itself seen as a barrier to available treatment escalation options.**

When considering the appropriateness and likely outcomes of treatment escalation for patients with End Stage Kidney Disease, two key assessments are important:

1.  The presence or absence of co-morbidities;

2.  Frailty (using the Clinical Frailty Score) as recommended by NICE guidance.

Many Trusts have developed Clinical Ethics Decision Groups in this crisis to help support clinicians guide.

There are a number of helpful guidelines available and sources of information, including (but not limited to):

**RCPguidance:**
file:///C:/Users/gwl/Downloads/Ethical%20guidance%20for%20publication%20V3_final_0.pdf
NICE guidance: https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng159
BMA guidance: https://www.bma.org.uk/media/2226/bma-covid-19-ethics-guidance.pdf
ICNARC data: https://www.icnarc.org/Our-Audit/Audits/Cmp/Reports