



College of Respiratory  
Therapists of Ontario

Ordre des thérapeutes  
respiratoires de l'Ontario

# ETHICAL DILEMMA - INTUBATION

Practice FAQs

May 2012

## CASE STUDY

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I am an experienced RT who has worked most of my career in a hospital with a very busy labour and delivery unit and a level III NICU. I have intubated many newborns in my career! I recently move, and started a new job at my local community hospital. In this setting, there is a small labour and delivery unit and the RTs are expected to attend all high risk deliveries. It is an organizational requirement for RTs to become certified in neonatal intubation and RTs may intubate according to a medical directive that is in place. As part of the certification process, we all have NRP training and must perform 3 successful intubations under the direct supervision of an attending pediatrician or their designate. **If I was called to assist at the delivery of a baby presenting with severe meconium aspiration syndrome and I knew that the best course of action would be for me to intubate and suction the baby, could I go ahead and intubate even if I had not completed my hospital's certification process yet?**

## ANSWER

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The scenario that you outlined certainly poses an ethical dilemma, because there is an expectation that you meet your employer's requirements that is, the 3 supervised intubations you describe. However, if you have not yet been certified by the hospital and are faced with a situation such as you described (severe meconium aspiration), AND you are of the professional opinion that the infant requires intubation as a life-saving measure, AND you are competent to do so, then it would be appropriate to take such action. Should you choose to not intubate for fear of repercussion and the infant dies as a result, your professional judgement would likely be questioned. Alternatively, if you decided to intubate and the infant died regardless of your life-saving efforts and a complaint/investigation occurred, your defence would be that: 1) it was your professional opinion that intubation was necessary (that the baby would likely die without it), and 2) that you were competent to perform intubation.

The expectation is that you make every effort to meet the hospital's certification requirements as soon as is reasonable in order to avoid these types of dilemmas. As a reference you may wish to refer to the College's [Commitment to Ethical Practice](#) which includes a decision tree for situations like you described.



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Remember, your employer may have policies related to your authority to perform procedures including controlled acts, authorized acts and acts that fall within the public domain. If your employer's policies are more restrictive than the College's requirements— you should abide by your employer's policies. Where your employer's policies are more permissive than the requirements of the College — you must adhere to the requirements of the College. ([PPG Interpretation of Authorized Acts](#), p.13)