

# Instructions For Medical Examiner's Case Unexpected Death

## A. Categories

1. Suspicious Circumstances
2. Accidental Death
3. Violent Death
4. Suicide
5. Therapeutic Misadventure
6. Death During or Immediately Following an Operation or Other Hazardous Procedure
7. Unattended Death
8. A Patient Pronounced Dead-On-Arrival at the Clinical Center is Presumed by Maryland Law to Have Died in Maryland Regardless of Any Evidence to the Contrary, and is a Medical Examiner's Case UNTIL the Medical Examiner Releases the Body.

## B. NIH Physician's Responsibilities

The Physician who pronounces a patient dead must, as soon as possible:

1. Complete "Pronouncement of Death" (NIH-2508)
2. Notify the next-of-kin. DO NOT ask for permission for autopsy until the Medical Examiner has made a decision.
3. Telephone the Medical Examiner to:
  - a. Report the death,
  - b. Answer questions pertaining to all circumstances related to the death,
  - c. Refer Medical Examiner to Deputy Director, CC for additional information.
4. Complete "Report of Death" (NIH-1082):
  - a. Lines 1 and 2,
  - b. Items 1 through 6.

## C. Medical Examiner's Decision

1. Remains are released to NIH from Medical Examiner's jurisdiction:

### Physician

- a. Enter Medical Examiner's decision on "Pronouncement of Death" (NIH-2508).
- b. Explain Medical Examiner's decision to the family.

### Physician, Nursing, Admissions

- a. Follow procedures for hospital death (refer to "Handbook for Staff Physicians").
- b. Admissions will refer case to the CC Administration Office for review.

2. Remains are Medical Examiner's jurisdiction—NIH will perform autopsy:

### Medical Examiner

- a. Medical Examiner completes the Death Certificate.

### Physician

- a. Enter Medical Examiner's decision on "Pronouncement of Death" (NIH-2508).
- b. Explain Medical Examiner's decision to the family that an autopsy has been ordered.
- c. Complete "Authorization for Autopsy" (SF-523).
- d. Refer the family to Admissions for information regarding undertaker, etc.

### Admissions

- a. Admissions will make photocopy of Death Certificate for inclusion in Medical Record.
- b. Complete "Relative's Instructions Regarding Disposition of Body" (NIH-1286):
  - (1) Have next-of-kin sign form,
  - (2) Telegraphic consent is acceptable (telegrams should be addressed to the Admissions Section; sent U.S. Government Telegram; contain the patient's name and hospital number)—refer to "Procedure for Approval of Autopsy by Next-of-Kin Not Present at Clinical Center" (NIH-2588).

### Physician, Nursing, Admissions

- a. Follow procedures for hospital death (refer to "Handbook for Staff Physicians").

### Medicolegal

- a. Mails copy of NIH Autopsy Report to Medical Examiner upon receipt of written notification from Admissions.

3. Remains are Medical Examiner's jurisdiction—Medical Examiner will perform autopsy (DO NOT complete "Authorization for Autopsy" (SF-523)):

### Medical Examiner

- a. Medical Examiner completes the Death Certificate.

### Physician

- a. Notify Admissions, who in turn will call the CC Administrator on-call.
- b. Enter Medical Examiner's decision on "Pronouncement of Death" (NIH-2508).
- c. Explain Medical Examiner's decision to the family that an autopsy has been ordered.
- d. Refer the family to Admissions for information regarding undertaker, etc.

### Admissions

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### Physician, Nursing, Admissions

- a. Follow procedures for hospital death (refer to "Handbook for Staff Physicians").
- b. Admissions will notify the Medicolegal Section that the Medical Examiner is performing the autopsy.

### Medicolegal

- a. Prepares "Letter of Request" for the signature of the Chief, Surgical Pathology and Postmortem Service, Pathologic Anatomy Department.