

**SUNY DOWNSTATE MEDICAL CENTER**  
**UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL OF BROOKLYN**  
**POLICY AND PROCEDURE**

**NO:** DEATH--01

**Subject:** **DEATH**

**Page** 1 **of** 8

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**Original Issue date:** 8/96

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**Implementation date** 10/03

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**Approval date:** 7/04

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**JCAHO Standards:** RI.1.40, RI.1.2.80 PC.8.70  
RI.2.90,

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**Distribution:** ☒ **Administrative Manual**  
☒ **Department Manual**  
☒ **Patient Care Manual**  
☒ **AOD Manual**

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**Issued by:** **Regulatory Affairs**

**I. Purpose:**

To ensure that a standard process is followed when expiration occurs and to ensure that the University Hospital of Brooklyn is in compliance with all regulatory guidelines in regards to patient deaths.

**II. Definition(s):**

None

**III. Policy:**

A standard procedure ensuring completion of all necessary steps will be followed when a death occurs.

**IV. Responsibilities:**

Medical/ Dental Staff  
Nursing Department  
Pathology Department  
University Police/Public Safety  
Admitting Department

## **V. Procedure/Guidelines:**

### **A Deaths Involving Employees, Visitors, And Clinic Patients**

- 1) Should a person appear to be unconscious, or if it is suspected that death has occurred, the Cardiac Arrest Team should be notified immediately by calling Extension 2323.
- 2) A person must be declared dead by a physician. The medical resident responding to the code should pronounce the patient dead:

#### **DO NOT MOVE THE BODY**

- 3) Personal belongings will not be removed until authorization to do so is received from the medical examiner. At that point, personal belongings may be removed and given to a member of public safety. Belongings are then catalogued, witnessed and placed in a property envelope and sealed. For security purposes they should be held in the Public Safety Department.
- 4) Any death occurring on University Hospital premises, with the exception of a duly admitted patient, must be reported to the police and the medical examiner in the following manner:
  - a. The Public Safety Department will notify Hospital Administration, the Police and the Admitting Department of the death.
  - b. If the deceased is an employee, Hospital Administration will notify the Department of Human Resources.
  - c. On being notified, the Admitting Department will notify the Medical examiner and, if possible, secure authorization to remove the body to the morgue.

### **B. Documentation**

- 1) After the patient has been examined and pronounced dead by the physician, a note to that effect will be written in the progress notes section of the chart. The date, time, and cause of death will be indicated and the physician's signature must appear.
- 2) The house staff physician who pronounces the death will not leave the Hospital until the Expiration Check list is completed and certificate of death or the Medical Examiners Report are completed and signed.
- 3) Immediately following completion of the Expiration Check List the pronouncing Physician must obtain consent/refusal to consent for autopsy. Consent or refusals for autopsy must be documented on the Autopsy Consent/Refusal Form.
- 4) The Attending Physician or designee shall be contacted by the Admitting Department. As appropriate, the Certificate of Death/Medical Examiner Forms shall be prepared for the physician's completion and signatures.

- 5) When there is no Autopsy, the Pronouncing Physician/Designee will complete the Cause of Death Section on the Expiration Checklist. After the patient's chart, including the Checklist is sent to the Admitting Department the Death Certificate will be prepared by the Admitting Department. The Pronouncing physician/designee will go to the Admitting Office A1-329 at extensions 2863/4 to sign this certificate.
- 6) When there will be an Autopsy, the Pronouncing Physician/designee will complete the top section of the Expiration Checklist. The Pronouncing Physician/designee will go to the Admitting Office to sign the top portion of the Death Certificate.
- 7) The Admitting Department will contact the Pathology Department to inform them of the pending Autopsy. Pathology will pick up the Checklist, Death Certificate and the chart before the Autopsy will begin.
- 8) The Pathologist who has performed the autopsy will complete and sign the bottom section of the Death The completed, signed death certificate and the chart will be brought to the Admitting Department by the Pathologist or designee immediately following the Autopsy.

C. Transportation to Morgue

- 1) The nurse staff member will be responsible for preparing the body according to established procedure for removal to the Morgue. If the next of kin is present, they should be allowed a few minutes alone with the body.
- 2) The body will be taken to the morgue by a member of the messenger/ nursing/ escort staff during normal hours of operation when a morgue attendant is on duty (M-F 8AM-4PM). All other times the body is to be transported by the escort/ nursing staff and a University Police/Public Safety officer. Elevators # 8 and # 9 shall be used, and shall be manually operated by the guard. An entry shall be made in the morgue logbook indicating the date and the time, which the body arrived at the morgue.
- 3) All personal effects will be labeled and collected by a member of the nursing staff. If the next of kin is present and wishes to collect the effects at this time, he shall sign for them at the nursing station; otherwise, they shall be sent to the M.E.T.S. Office extension 1873.
- 4) In the event that the morgue refrigerator is malfunctioning or has reached capacity, bodies will be stored in the Anatomy Department refrigerator, located in room B-25. (See LAB-25)

D Notification of Admitting

- 1) Immediately upon the death of a patient, the clerk in the patient area where the death occurred shall notify the Admitting Department by phone. The nursing station clerk will then enter a "discharge by death" in the computer. If no clerk is available then the Charge Nurse will notify admitting.
- 2) The Nursing Station Clerk will be responsible for putting the chart in order and then having the chart and Consent for Autopsy delivered to the Admitting Department. If no clerk is available, the nurse in charge carries out this responsibility.

- 3) The Admitting Control Person, upon notification of a patient's expiration shall complete a page in the "D" Book (Expiration Log) documenting the patient's expiration.
- 4) Upon receipt of the expired patient's chart, the Admitting Representative will check for the Expiration Check List and Consent/Refusal for Autopsy.
- 5) The Admitting Representative will ensure that each of the steps as outlined in the Expiration Check List have been completed including:
  - Notification to next of kin
  - ME Referral
  - Consent/Refusal for Autopsy
  - Causes of Death
- 6) If completed documentation is not received within three hours of the patient's expiration, appropriate steps to obtain this information from the appropriate Physician /or his/her supervising physician(s) shall be taken.

**E     Completion of Death Certificate**

- 1) All death certificates are to be completed and ready for pick-up by a Funeral Director within 8 hours of the expiration.
- 2) All forms must be filled out, in permanent black ink or typed, and signed.
- 3) The Admitting representative will be responsible for seeing that the Death Certificate is filled out properly. The Admitting Representative will fill in the top (clerical) part of the certificate and the physician shall fill out the bottom (medical) portion, and sign the certificate.
- 4) When an autopsy is performed and the cause of death is revealed but is not available by the time the death certificate must be given to the funeral director, the clinical cause of death may be entered on the medical portion of the death certificate.
- 5) Upon completion of the Death Certificate, the Admitting Representative shall make a photocopy of the certificate and include it in the chart. If there is Consent for Autopsy, the Admitting Representative shall notify the Morgue and Pathologist of the Autopsy Consent.
- 6) In the case of City burials, form VR.21 (Burial Permit), will be completed in the Admitting Department.

**Viewing**

Viewing by close family members will be permitted up to (6) hours after patient is pronounced. Thereafter, viewing will be permitted based on the discretion of the nursing supervisor/designee. Upon viewing of the body, a note shall be made in the morgue log by the morgue attendant/nurse and University Police/Public Safety indicating the date and time of the viewing and those family members who were present. The body is to be prepared by the morgue attendant for viewing.

The morgue attendant can be reached during the hours of 8AM-4PM, Monday-Friday, via the page operator or by contacting the Pathology Department at x1669. In the absence of a morgue attendant, nursing shall perform this function.

At any given time, no more than (4) family members will be allowed in the viewing area.

## **Release of Body**

When the Funeral Director or City Morgue Attendant arrives to remove the body, he shall report to the Admitting Department. The Funeral Director shall provide Admitting with an affidavit for the release of the body and sign in the Admitting "D" Book.

Upon receipt of the affidavit, the admitting representative shall verify the affidavit and ensure that it is complete. The Admitting Representative will not issue an authorization for the release of body form to the funeral director, nor provide any information without a completed affidavit. The Admitting Representative shall provide the funeral director with the completed death certificate and authorization for the release of the body form. A copy of the affidavit will be providing to University Police/Public Safety so that the information may be verified. Any discrepancies should be resolved prior to the body being released. If necessary, the Director of Admitting or AOD should be contacted to discuss any unresolved issues.

The Admitting Representative will notify University Police/Public Safety and the morgue attendant who will meet the Funeral Director in the morgue. When a morgue attendant is not on duty, the AOD and a Public Safety Officer will accompany the Funeral Director to the morgue and unlock the door if necessary. The Morgue Room is AB-494.

The Morgue attendant/AOD and/or University Police/Public Safety Officer will check the identification of the body by means of the identification tag affixed to the big toe. An entry shall be made in the morgue log by the morgue attendant or AOD and University Police/Public Safety officer indicating the date, time and name of the funeral director to whom the body is being released to.

## **Unclaimed Bodies**

- 1) When a body is unclaimed for 48 hours, the next-of-kin has been notified of the death, the death is not a medical examiner's case, and there is no objection made to an autopsy by next-of-kin, within 48 hours of death or 24 hours after such notice of death the administrator of the hospital according to Public Health law, Section 4214 (1) may order an autopsy.
- 2) By law, the City can take possession of the body.
- 3) To dispose of the remains the following procedure should be followed:
  - a) The Request for City Burial must be filled out by the Department of Pathology.
  - b) This form must be submitted to the New York City Department of Health.
  - c) A representative of the New York City Health Department will contact the morgue attendant and arrange to pick up the body for burial.

## **Body Donation Program**

- 1) Should a family or patient wish to donate a body to the Medical School, they can be referred to the Department of Anatomy at x1027 or 1014, (M-F, 9AM-5PM).

- 2) The Anatomy and Cell Biology main office will contact Dr. James Neill, Anatomical Gifts Program Director, at 270-1025. He will then notify the school mortician who will contact the Hospital and make the necessary arrangements for pick up of the body and appropriate paperwork. If Dr. Neill is not available, the Department of Anatomy and Cell Biology main office will then contact the mortician directly.
- 3) During evening or weekend hours' the Hospital's Admissions Department can contact the mortician directly at 1-516-599-0041 or 1-800-526-5761.
- 4) If a family member or patient either here or at another hospital contacts the Hospital Admissions office with questions about making an anatomical gift or if they wish to obtain a donor information packet, they may contact Dr. James Neill at the above phone number.
- 5) The Department of Anatomy and Cell Biology will handle the cost of transportation embalming, cremation and burial in the school cemetery plot. There is no cost to the donor's family or friend for any of these services. If the family or friend desires, they can elect to receive the ashes for private internment instead of school burial. The school mortician and the Department of Anatomy and Cell Biology will handle the arrangements.

### **Organ Donation**

All deaths and imminent death are to be referred to the Organ Donor Network (ODN), which is University's Hospital of Brooklyn's designated organ procurement organization. Upon notification of any patient death, Admitting will contact the Organ Donor Network (ODN) at 1-800-884-4449 and inform them of the expiration.

- 1) At point of referral, the Organ Donor Network (ODN) will make an initial assessment of the case in determining whether the deceased is a potential organ or tissue donor. Solely the ODN coordinator shall determine suitability.
- 2) If additional clinical information is requested by the ODN, Admitting will contact the nursing supervisor responsible for the unit in which the death occurred and inform them of the request.
- 3) Admitting will provide the nursing supervisor with the name of the patient, case reference number, and the ODN contact name and number.
- 4) The nursing supervisor shall provide the ODN with the necessary clinical information in making final determination of the suitability of the potential candidate.
- 5) If it is determined by the ODN that the patient is a suitable candidate, the ODN coordinator shall make the request for donation to the family. Written Consent to organ donation will be obtained by the ODN coordinator under the supervision of a member of the medical/nursing hospital staff.
- 6) If a hold on the body is requested by the ODN, the admitting shall be notified so that the body is not released to the funeral until a final determination is made, however not to delay the burial proceedings. In the event of a Medical Examiner's case, the ODN shall be notified and the body is to be released to the Medical Examiner immediately.

## **Unsuccessful Death Notification of Patient's Next-of-Kin**

- 1) In those cases where hospital staff have been unable to reach the next-of-kin for notification of a person's death, Hospital Administration will notify the New York Police Department's Missing Person's Squad.
- 2) The Director of Hospital Admissions or designee as hospital liaison will be responsible for completing the "Request for Police Investigation" Form.
- 3) The original and one copy will accompany the deceased to the Morgue. If the deceased is being released to a medical school or certain other legally designated institutions, the original will be mailed and one copy stays with the deceased.
- 4) One copy will be attached to the death certificate in the patient's medical record.
- 5) A "Request for Police Investigation" form must be completed for every death in which the next-of-kin were not notified.
- 6) In cases where medical schools (and certain other institutions) take disposition of unclaimed, non-medical examiner cadavers directly without routing them through to borough mortuaries, the Hospital liaison may [after consultation with the Director of Admissions]:
- 7) Notify the NYPD. Missing Persons Squad at: (212)-233-4152, provide the name of the medical school the name and telephone number of the medical school contact person and date of death. Mail the original RFPI Form to the NYPD at the following address:

**Missing Persons Squad  
New York Police Department  
Room 11110  
One Police Plaza  
New York, New York 10038  
ATT.: Morgue Liaison Officer**

- 8) Public Health Law, Section 4211 A-D indicates that medical schools and certain other institutions are entitled to receive unclaimed bodies that are not medial examiner cases if there is no claim made for the body by the family, relatives, or friends within 48 hours after death or 24 hours from notice of death.
- 9) If during the police investigation information is requested by a properly identified NYPD detective, the Director of Admissions, or designee as hospital liaison will:
  - Request the inquiring detective's name, badge number, and location.
  - Verify the detective's identity and assignment with the supervisor of the NYPD Missing Persons Squad at (212) 233-4152.
  - Provide any requested information from the patient's chart, which would help identify next-of-kin or others responsible for the deceased.
- 10) The remains of the deceased will be kept in appropriate safe storage until the police department completes its investigation.
- 11) Should there be any problems with the implementation of this policy and procedure, the Administrator on Duty should be contacted.

**VI. Reasons for Revision:**

- ☐ **Changes in regulatory or statutory laws or standards**
- ☐ **System failures/changes**
- ☐ **Institutional/operational changes**

**VII. Attachments:**

Admitting Death Record form

**VIII. References:**

The End of Life, 6th Edition, 1994, pp 34-35  
New York City Health Code (Section 205.03)  
Death Policy 2 - M.E. Cases  
Death Policy 3 - Autopsy Consent/Referral

JCAHO Standards

<b>Date Reviewed</b>	<b>Revision Required (Circle One)</b>		<b>Responsible Staff Name and Title</b>
8/03-7/04	<b>(Yes)</b>	No	Daniel Graves, Director Admitting Department
10/03-7/04	<b>(Yes)</b>	No	Alix Laguerre, Director Laboratory Services
10/03-7/04	<b>(Yes)</b>	No	Jackie Herron, Sr. Associate. Administrator, Medical Management
10/03-7/04	<b>Yes</b>	No	Jocelyn Alleyne, R.N.,





SUNY  
DOWNSTATE  
Medical Center  
University Hospital of Brooklyn

Admitting Death Record

FULL NAME OF

DECEASED \_\_\_\_\_

EXPIRATION DATE \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_ Service \_\_\_\_\_ Physician \_\_\_\_\_

M.R.# \_\_\_\_\_ Pt. Serial # \_\_\_\_\_ Adm Date \_\_\_\_\_ Adm Source \_\_\_\_\_ NS/RM \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

PRONOUNCING

PHYSICIAN \_\_\_\_\_

Admitting Notified of Death ( ) Yes ( ) No Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

Chart Received ( ) Yes ( ) No Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

Pathology called (X1669) ( ) Yes ( ) No Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

Autopsy Done ( ) Yes ( ) No Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

Medical examiner Case ( ) Yes ( ) No Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

Time Death Cert. Completed ( ) Yes ( ) No Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

NY/ODN Notified (1-800-884-4449) ( ) Yes ( ) No Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

Spoke with/Reference

# \_\_\_\_\_

## EXPIRATION PACKET COMPLETED

Autopsy Consent ( ) Yes ( ) No Date\_\_\_\_\_Time\_\_\_\_\_

Anatomical Gift Inquiry ( ) Yes ( ) No Date\_\_\_\_\_Time\_\_\_\_\_

Anatomical Gift Consent ( ) Yes ( ) No Date\_\_\_\_\_Time\_\_\_\_\_

### MEDICAL RECORDS

Chart Retrieved:\_\_\_\_\_Date:\_\_\_\_\_Time:\_\_\_\_\_Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Certificate Retrieved:\_\_\_\_\_Date:\_\_\_\_\_Time:\_\_\_\_\_Signature\_\_\_\_\_

### FUNERAL DIRECTOR

Funeral Director called to pick up remains Date:\_\_\_\_\_Time:\_\_\_\_\_Telephone #\_\_\_\_\_

Company/Organization Removing the Remains\_\_\_\_\_

Address\_\_\_\_\_

Person Removing the Deceased (print name)\_\_\_\_\_

Date:\_\_\_\_\_ Time\_\_\_\_\_

Signature\_\_\_\_\_

### ADMITTING REPRESENTATIVE RELEASING REMAINS TO THE FUNERAL DIRECTOR

Date\_\_\_\_\_