

Care after death

Comfort assessment and management fact sheet

Care of the person after death includes:

- verification of death
- notifying the Coroner (if a reportable death)
- notifying and supporting family/carer(s)
- care of the deceased person's body
- other communication
- certification of death.

Verification of death

Is the physiological assessment to confirm the fact of death by a medical officer or registered nurse on the ward, completing the Life Extinct form. The clinical determinants are:

- no palpable carotid pulse
- no heart sounds for 30 continuous seconds
- no breath sounds heard for 30 continuous seconds
- fixed dilated pupils
- no response to centralised stimuli
- no motor (withdrawal) response or facial grimace response to painful stimuli

Notifying and supporting family/carer(s)

At time of death provide support to family/carers according to their individual needs. This includes providing privacy if desired, allowing them to spend time with the person and support to carry out specific religious or cultural rituals. Refer to social work or pastoral care for support and provide written resources (CPDP Family and Carer information pack) regarding next steps, what to do when their loved one has died and grief and bereavement support.

Care of the deceased person's body

This is a very important component and can have enormous impacts on the family/carer(s) experience.

The family may wish to be involved in washing and laying out their loved one. Further considerations include arranging a viewing of the deceased if family not present, corneal and tissue donation, removal of cardiac devices, discussion with the coroner and postmortem process. Refer to local hospital procedures for specific guidance regarding removal of lines, cannulas, catheters.

Other communication

The person's death should be documented and communicated to other health care professionals and providers previously involved in their care. Consideration to offer support or debrief to members of the healthcare team who cared for the deceased person.

Certification of death

Is the process of completing the Medical Certificate, a legislative requirement that only registered medical practitioners can complete. This includes providing a diagnosis of the cause of death under the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1996. Reviewable and reportable deaths to the coroner are managed as per local hospital procedures and policies.

References

Therapeutic Guidelines. (2024). *Palliative care: After-death care* https://app.tg.org.au/guidelines/Palliative_Care

www.donatelife.gov.au/find-your-local-donatelife-agency/donatelife-queensland

Coronial autopsies and the coronial process | Coronial and Public Health Sciences | Queensland Health <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/public-health/forensic-and-scientific-services>