

The Palliative Response Guidelines for Pronouncement

Preparation before Death Pronouncement

Be prepared to answer pertinent questions
Nursing staff can provide wealth of information
Know recent events, family response and dynamics,
and special problems or concerns

Assess Immediate Situation

Death expected or sudden?

Family present or notified?

Attending notified?

Autopsy

Determine family preference

Consider value of autopsy

Organ Donation

If family requests, contact organ donation
counselor to discuss details

Faith Tradition

Consider Pastoral Care contacts

Honor requirements/procedures/rituals

Entering the Room

Assume quiet, respectful attitude

Ask nurse to accompany for introductions

Introduce yourself and role: ***"I am the doctor on call"***

Determine relationships of persons present

Inform family of purpose; invite to them to remain

Empathize simply:

"I am sorry for your loss; this is a difficult time"

Pronouncement Procedure Clinical Examination

Check ID bracelet and pulse

Check pupils for position and response to light

Check response to tactile stimuli

Examine respectfully:

No Sternal Rubs or Nipple Pinches

Check for spontaneous respiration

Check for heart sound and pulses

Record time of death

Birmingham/Atlanta
Geriatric Research, Education and
Clinical Center

Follow-Up

When You Are Patient's Physician

Invite family to contact you over the next few days, weeks, or months if questions arise or problems occur

When You Are Physician on Call

Assure family you will report death to the attending physician, whom they may contact with questions or concerns

Death Note in Chart

- Document date and time
- Document name of provider pronouncing death
- Provide brief statement of cause of death
- Note absence of pulse, respiration, pupil response
- Note if family present or informed
- Note family response if indicated
- Note notification of attending, pastoral care, social work or others as appropriate

Death Certificate

Locate sample Death Certificate on unit

Complete marked sections. Write neatly in black ink.

Begin again if make an error (cross-outs not allowed)

Document cause of death -

Primary cause of death - Example - Pneumonia

Secondary cause of death - Example - Advanced Alzheimer's Dementia

Contributing cause of death - Example - Agent Orange, Asbestosis. List other illnesses possibly linked to patient's disability or service-connection

Documentation assists family to obtain benefits

Families appreciate and respond to a respectful and kind approach to this final medical act

If families should contact you later

- Take time
- Inquire about family members
- Listen carefully
- Respond empathically



**Death Pronouncement is the Final Medical Act
Handle with Care**