

Autopsy

I. Hours of Operation

Autopsy: 8:00 AM - 3:00 PM; Sunday - Saturday

II. Contact Section

Phone: 449-4630

III. Scope of Testing

Post-mortem examination of all or part of the body to determine extent of disease, efficacy or treatment, assessment of factors that may be of value to other family members (e.g. congenital or genetic), examined by histologic, immunologic, or microbiologic methods. The appropriate legal authorities perform medico-legal examinations.

IV. Responsibility of the Attending Physician

It is the responsibility of the attending physician and/or house staff caring for the decedent to obtain an Authorization for Autopsy whenever possible and if no authorization is obtained, the reason shall be noted in the medical record.

- A. Jurisdiction of the Coroner (see section VI) has precedence.
- B. The known desires of the decedent then take precedence concerning the disposition of the body and for autopsy (sections VI and VII).
- C. The rights and desires of the spouse/next of kin shall then be honored insofar as is possible.

V. Prohibition Against Invading or Disturbing the Body

- A. No invasive procedure of any type may be performed on the body after death is pronounced without the documented desire of the decedent, a valid Authorization for Autopsy or other valid consent signed by the spouse/next-of-kin (VI), or by order of the Coroner when in his jurisdiction. This shall include the obtaining of any blood, fluid or biopsy specimen for any purpose including possible transplantation. At death neither tubes nor lines shall be removed, and all clothing and valuables shall be left in place, pending determination of the Coroner's jurisdiction.
- B. A complete evaluation of the case shall immediately be made to determine possible Coroner's jurisdiction (VI). The body may not be moved or disturbed, except to determine death and perform any life saving measures, until it is determined that it is not a Coroner's case or it is released (see section VI.B.3).
- C. A physician shall pronounce death based on the usual clinical criteria. In the case of patients on resuscitation, or who will be organ transplant donors, Hospital policy should be consulted.

VI. Coroner's Jurisdiction

A determination must be made prior to attempting to obtain an Authorization for Autopsy as to whether the Coroner has jurisdiction. In any of the following situations the Coroner should immediately be contacted at 444-7000. In the case of probable unlawful death the police should be notified (Omaha 444--5656).

- A. The following constitute cases over which the Coroner has jurisdiction:

1. Any death possibly by unlawful means, to include the following circumstances:

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- a. Violent deaths (homicide, suicide, recent or remote accidents)
 - b. Deaths due to thermal, electrical or radiation injury
 - c. Deaths due to abortion whether induced or not
 - d. Deaths due to employment related disease or injury, recent or remote
 - e. Stillbirths or infant deaths not under direct medical supervision. In the case of sudden and unexpected death of a child between the ages of one week and three years. An autopsy shall be performed at County expense unless the parent or guardian signs a written waiver of the right to autopsy (Nebraska Statutes Section 71-605)
 - f. Deaths from hazardous conditions or contagious disease
 - g. Deaths without medically determined cause
 - h. Persons found dead or dead on arrival
 - i. Death within 24 hours of admission
 - j. Any death possibly caused by neglect, violence or any unlawful means
 - k. Any death as the result of an accident involving a motor vehicle.
 - l. Persons under the age of 18.
- B. The Coroner may:
1. Accept jurisdiction and inspect the body in place with all tubes, lines, clothing and valuables in place and direct the disposition of the body, or
 2. Accept jurisdiction and direct the disposition of the body without on site inspection or
 3. Decline jurisdiction, in which case the death shall be treated as a non-Coroner's case.
- C. The Coroner accepting jurisdiction may then:
1. Investigate the case and have autopsy performed by the Coroner's physician or other designee, including Creighton Pathology, or
 2. Perform such investigation as may be required without autopsy, and
 3. The Coroner shall then have the death certificate signed by the Coroner's physician.

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VII. Certificate of Death and Release of Body

The Certificate of Death shall be prepared by the funeral director and signed by the attending physician within 24 hours of death, unless the Coroner accepts jurisdiction. The body shall be transferred to the morgue as soon as possible. All bodies MUST have an identification tag to be accepted. Viewing by relatives will not be permitted in the morgue. Prior to transfer to the morgue, valuables shall be removed from the body and a Release of Body form initiated to be signed by the spouse/next-of-kin (IV) authorizing removal to a funeral home and disposition of the body. This form shall accompany the body to the morgue. Infectious and radioactive bodies shall be appropriately labeled and appropriate precautions taken.

VIII. Feti

- A. All live births must be handled in the same manner as any adult death.
- B. Stillbirths over 20 weeks uterogestation may be disposed of by the hospital instead of a funeral home if an Authorization for Hospital Disposition is completed. An Authorization for Autopsy is required if an autopsy is to be performed, if disposal is authorized. Otherwise, stillbirths shall be handled in the same manner as other deaths.
- C. Stillbirths under 20 weeks uterogestation and Products of Conception are handled as surgical specimens and Authorization for Hospital Disposition is required.
- D. All live births, regardless of gestation, shall be handled in the same manner as any other death.

IX. Authorization for Autopsy

- A. In the case of deaths not under the Coroner's jurisdiction, or those released by the Coroner, an attempt shall be made by the treating physician to obtain an Authorization for Autopsy. The desires of the decedent take precedence, and secondly the next-of-kin controls the disposition of the remains and has the authority to authorize the autopsy. The order of spouse/next-of-kin in Nebraska is as follows:
 - 1. Surviving spouse.
 - 2. If the spouse is incompetent or not available, adult children.
 - 3. Surviving parent(s).
 - 4. Adult brother(s) or sister(s).
 - 5. Adult person in the next degrees of kindred according to the rules of civil law.
- B. The Following Additional Guidance is Furnished

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1. Any individual of the nearest degree of kindred may sign, provided there is no known objection by any other kindred of the same degree.
2. A guardian of the nearest degree of kindred may sign, provided there is no known objection by any other kindred of the same degree.
3. A separated spouse is the surviving spouse.
4. A divorced (final only) or common-law spouse has no rights.
5. An adult is age 19 (Nebraska), age 18 (Iowa), or older but a married individual is an adult, regardless of age, and may sign. For this purpose Iowa law would apply to an Iowa resident and next-of-kin.
6. If there are no kindred (IX.A.) and any other individual claims the body and agrees to bury it, such person may sign the Authorization for Autopsy. Decedents with no known kin must be held ten days after death but may be claimed by any person willing to dispose of the remains. If no such person claims the body it shall be turned over to the State Anatomical Board, unless a veteran.
7. The Coroner may sign the Authorization for Autopsy on a case under Coroner's jurisdiction; such necropsies shall ordinarily be performed by the Coroner's physician, and not at Creighton University Medical Center.
8. Telephonic consents may be obtained if properly witnessed by two persons on the telephone, but should only be utilized when the spouse/next-of-kin cannot be present because of long distances, illness, or other adverse conditions.

X. Organ Donors

If it is desired to take organs for transplantation from a dead body, special permits must be obtained from the next-of-kin or a proper record of the decedent's directions in this regard must be available.

The next-of-kin of every decedent deemed to be a suitable organ donor must be offered the opportunity to consent or decline organ donation unless:

- A. There is known contrary intent of the decedent or any other kin, or
- B. There is reason to believe it would be contrary to the religious beliefs of the decedent. Such actions must be certified at the time of signing the death certificate and shall be noted in the medical record.

XI. Donation of the Body

If the decedent has made arrangements, or the next-of-kin desires to donate the body of the decedent for educational or scientific purposes, please call the Nebraska State Anatomical Board (phone: 280-2015 or 559-6249).