

The Autopsy at BIDMC

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Objectives

- 'Report of Death' and 'Death Certificate'
- Cause of death
- Notifications- Medical examiner, Admitting
- Autopsy and permissions

Page 1; instructions

INSTRUCTIONS FOR REPORTING A DEATH

The following steps should be undertaken by the physician pronouncing and reporting the death:

- Contact the Responsible Family Member & Primary Care Physician
- Offer the family an autopsy (*see reverse for instructions)
- Complete the attached Report of Death Form (2 pages)
- Notify the Medical Examiner, if appropriate (see page 3) - Phone # (617) 267-6767
- Notify the Admitting Office - Phone # (617) 754-2210
- Send completed Report of Death form to Admitting Office (East or West Campus)

Page 2; instructions

POST MORTEM PERMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Post Mortem Permission must be obtained from the nearest responsible relative (the next of kin). **Health care proxy does not apply, and no substitutions are allowed (i.e. children cannot stand in for spouse).**

SELECT IN THIS ORDER:

1. SPOUSE
2. CHILDREN OF LEGAL AGE (Legal age meaning those 18 years of age or older and emancipated minors. ALL must agree- one may sign on behalf of all)
3. PARENTS (Both must agree if both are living- one may sign on behalf of both.)
4. SIBLINGS (ALL living siblings 18 year or older must agree - one may sign on behalf of all.)
5. GRANDPARENTS
6. UNCLE, AUNT, or FIRST COUSIN
7. LEGAL GUARDIAN
8. Any person authorized or under obligation to dispose of a body.

A sample script for obtaining autopsy permission:

To ensure the quality of care, we routinely perform an autopsy on all patients who die at the medical center.

This is a service that the hospital provides, free of charge, to help us answer any questions that you or the doctors might have about his/her disease or the care he/she received.

The autopsy need not delay your funeral preparations, and even a complete autopsy will not disfigure the body, should you want a viewing.

Would you like us to perform an autopsy?

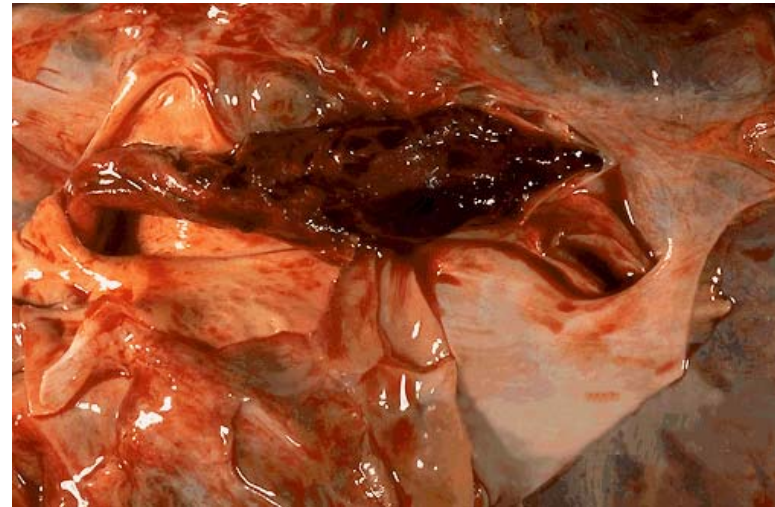
Page 3: Cause of Death

- **CHIEF** cause of death: is the disease or injury, which initiated the train of morbid events leading directly to death.
- **IMMEDIATE** cause of death: Immediate event ("last straw") associated with death.

CHIEF CAUSE OF DEATH (MUST BE COMPLETED BY REPORTING PHYSICIAN):	
IMMEDIATE CAUSE:	INTERVAL BETWEEN ONSET & DEATH
ANTECEDENT CAUSE(s):	INTERVAL BETWEEN ONSET & DEATH

Example Clinical Vignette

- A man crashes the car and fractures his femur, but dies 8 days later due to a pulmonary embolus
- Immediate cause of death:
Pulmonary embolus due to...
- Chief cause of death:
Injuries related to auto-crash.
- ME case (Trauma)



Forensic vs. Hospital Autopsy

- Forensic (coroner's) autopsy
 - Stresses the distinction of unnatural from natural causes of death
 - ME must consider/decline all cases involving physical trauma, DOA, unwitnessed death, death <24hrs in-hospital, death associated with therapeutic procedures...
- Hospital/academic autopsies
 - Nearly all due to "natural" causes ("chief cause")
 - Drugs, new therapies may produce complications leading to death ("immediate cause")

Page 3-4; Medical Examiner

- **TRAUMA:** no matter when the actual event occurred
- **DIAGNOSTIC OR THERAPEUTIC PROCEDURES:** regardless of where or date performed
- **OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES**
 - Unexpected death
 - Deaths within 24hours of admission
 - Patients admitted comatose/irrational who never improved
 - Sexual or physical abuse/neglect
 - Acute and /or chronic use of alcohol, drugs and/or poisons

 - Neonates delivered of alcohol or drug dependent mothers or after a history of maternal trauma.
 - Children under 18 years of age from any cause (excluding neonates living less than 24 hours).
 - Fetal deaths (stillborns) > 20 weeks, 350 g

Page 3; Medical Examiner

INDICATE ACTION BY THE MEDICAL EXAMINER

1. ACCEPTED CASE - WILL DO POST MORTEM: DATE ___/___/___ TIME ____ AM PM

2. ACCEPTED CASE - BIDMC WILL DO POST MORTEM: DATE ___/___/___ TIME ____ AM
PM

3. WAIVED CASE

NAME OF PERSON WHO RECEIVED CALL AT MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE	DATE	TIME AM PM

SIGNATURE OF PHYSICIAN	DATE	TIME
M.D. PAGER#		

Page 3; No Autopsy

If you have answered "No" to all of the questions above or the case was waived by the Medical Examiner, will there be a VOLUNTARY post mortem examination? Yes No

IF "YES", OBTAIN CONSENT FOR AUTOPSY (See attached AUTOPSY CONSENT form.)

IF "NO", PLEASE IDENTIFY: _____
INDIVIDUAL CONTACTED RELATIONSHIP TO DECEASED

X _____ M.D. _____ /_____/_____
SIGNATURE OF PHYSICIAN PRINT NAME OF PHYSICIAN PAGER ID # DATE TIME AM PM

Page 4; Yes Autopsy

- Who gives autopsy permission:
- Spouse > ALL children > BOTH parents > ALL siblings > call admitting
- Health care proxy does not apply after death
- Patient may sign a “durable power of Attorney” prior to death

Page 4; Restrictions

SPECIFIC RESTRICTIONS OR REQUESTS

No

Yes

If “Yes”, specify:

If “No”, a full autopsy will be performed including removal of all organs including the brain.

Page 5; organs

- We generally remove all the organs from the body and retain them for additional analysis beyond the burial of the body. **This is generally necessary to get complete information.**
- The tissues are later cremated in a manner similar to the treatment of tissues removed during surgery.
- The law requires families to make several choices
 - Can we retain the organs or should we replace them in the body and issue a limited autopsy report?
 - Can the organs be used in teaching and research. This means that they will not be destroyed for a prolonged period of time.

Page 5; organs

DISPOSITION OF ORGANS FOLLOWING AUTOPSY:

- This permission covers the removal of internal organs and tissues as may be deemed necessary by the examining physician for analyzing disease processes and determining the cause of death except as specified above by the person authorizing the autopsy. It is understood that due care will be taken to avoid disfiguring the body.
- The person authorizing the autopsy has the right to control the final disposition of the organs. Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center will return all organs with the body of the decedent at the time the body is released, except for those organs for which prolonged fixation or complete detailed examination is required in order to complete the autopsy, unless the authorizing person designates an alternative disposition below.
- The organs retained for detailed examination will be specified in the final autopsy report. The results of the autopsy will be available from the deceased's physician in approximately 8 weeks.

1) Disposition of organs (choose one):

- I authorize Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center to retain any organs for further examination to determine the cause of death or understand the effects of therapy. I authorize the hospital to dispose of retained organs.
- I do not authorize Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center to retain any organs. All organs will be returned with the body for burial and a limited report of the findings will be issued to the deceased's physician. (The brain will generally not be examined.) Skip item 2 below.

2) Medical research and education (choose one):

- I authorize Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and/or Harvard Medical School to retain organs for purposes of medical research and education.
- I do not authorize organs being retained for purposes of medical research and education.

Page 5; Contact pathology

**SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED BY THE AUTOPSY.
TO BE COMPLETED BY THE CLINICIAN (print name):**

Please page the Pathology resident on call via pager # 30062 or the Page Operator.

Common concerns about autopsies

- Is there a charge? NO
- Will the autopsy affect funeral arrangements? NO
- Does the pathologist retain any organs? Yes (if permitted by the family).
- Are there religious conflicts? Yes, but resolvable.
- Patient handout related to autopsy is available on CareWeb - If the family is unsure, give them the document and do a telephone permission later.

