Verification and Certification of Death

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Gippsland Region Palliative Care Consortium Clinical Practice Group

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Purpose This policy has been endorsed by the GRPCC Clinical Practice Group and is based on current evidence-based practice and should be used to inform clinical practice, policies and procedures in health services. The intent of the policy is to promote region wide adoption of best practice. Enquiries can be directed to GRPCC by email enquiries@grpcc.com.au or phone 03 56230684

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Policy Statement

All palliative care patients within Gippsland are to have timely verification of death.

All patients within Gippsland will have a death certificate signed by a qualified Medical Practitioner within 48 hours of the death, unless they are required to report the death to the Coroner.

Definitions

Certification of Death

The legislative requirement for a registered medical practitioner who was responsible for a person's medical care immediately before death, or who examines the body of a deceased person after death, to sign a death certificate unless required to notify the Coroner within 48 hours after the death.

Verification of death (refer to DoH Guidance note – Jan 2009)

Verification of Death refers to establishing that death has occurred after a clinical assessment of a body. The following people can verify the death:

- A registered Medical Practitioner
- A Division 1 or Division 3 Registered Nurse (within the meaning of the Health Professions Registration Act 2005) or
- A Paramedic (a person credentialed by Ambulance Victoria as either an Ambulance Paramedic or a MICA Paramedic).

There is no legal requirement for the funeral industry to obtain written verification of death before moving the deceased body to a more appropriate location.

Policy

Verification by Registered Nurse in a community setting

1.1.

- The patient admission procedure identifies whether the LMO is willing to provide a death certificate for the patient, and whether available to provide verification of death.
- At admission, deteriorating or terminal phase it shall be documented which health provider/service will be responsible for verification of death.
- The community team must establish if the funeral directors require verification prior to the removal of the deceased.
- If a 24-hour contact number for the LMO is provided, staff shall contact the LMO, if not staff will make contact as soon as possible the next working day to ensure a Death Certificate is provided.
- If a Community Nurse attends the deceased patient, he/she must document verification of death in the medical record.

1.2. If the Registered Nurse is verifying death they must examine the patient for signs of life. The suite of clinical determinants below act as a minimum guideline for the clinical assessment necessary to establish that death has occurred (i.e. “verify death”). Professional clinical judgement is required to make this determination and unique circumstances may warrant additional checks over and above the minimum guidelines provided below:

- No palpable pulse, and
No heart sounds heard for 2 minutes, and
No breath sounds heard for 2 minutes, and
Fixed (non-responsive to light) and dilated pupils, and
No response to centralised stimuli (e.g. trapezius muscle squeeze, supraorbital pressure, mandibular pressure or the common sternal rub), and
No motor (withdrawal) response or facial grimace in response to painful stimulus (e.g. pinching inner aspect of the elbow).
Optional: ECG rhythm strip shows no rhythm.

1.3. Documentation of verification of death by a Registered Nurse must be filed in the patient’s history and include:
- Name and signature of the Registered Nurse verifying the death
- Professional title of the Registered Nurse verifying the death
- The clinical determinants used to verify the death (as above)
- The date of verification
- The time of verification
- The location of where the assessment took place.

1.4. Refer back to individual organisations policies and procedures regarding reporting of verification of death, and ongoing support and debriefing for staff.

References

Key Performance Indicators
100% of patients/clients to have a death certificate signed by a legally qualified medical practitioner within 48hrs of death, with the exception of reportable deaths to the Coroner.
Verification documentation will be compliant with Department of Health service guidelines.