

AUTOPSY

It is the responsibility of the patient's physician to initiate the steps required for an autopsy and to obtain autopsy permission; that is, to inform the patient's relatives of the reasons for doing an autopsy and to make certain the next of kin understand the general terms and nature of the procedure involved.

Autopsies are performed weekday evenings, and during the day on Saturdays and Sundays. Cases which arrive after 10:00 a.m. Monday through Friday are normally scheduled to be done on the following day. If there are unusual circumstances in which a delay would create special problems, contact the pathologist on call through the Telephone Operator and Admitting Office as they have up-to-date on-call schedules.

1. Notification of Death:

- a. immediately following a death anywhere in the hospital, the telephone operator is to be notified of: time of death, the individual physician pronouncing the death, and who will complete the death certificate. It is the charge nurse's responsibility to ensure that notification is timely and complete.
- b. The telephone operator will relay the above information to the Admitting office.
- c. Autopsies will be performed only when an autopsy permit has been signed. The legal right to grant an autopsy is vested in the following and in the order listed:
 - 1) Spouse
 - 2) An adult son or daughter
 - 3) Either parent (both for minor)
 - 4) Adult brother or sister
 - 5) A guardian of the decedent at time of death
 - 6) Any other person authorized or under obligation to dispose of body
- d. In the event of an autopsy, the Admitting Office will notify Pathology after ensuring the consent is valid. This includes checking with the Administration Office to resolve problems when necessary.

2. Medical Records and Permission for Autopsy: Order for Delivery of Body and Undertaker's Receipt:

The physician pronouncing the death is responsible for taking the completed autopsy permit, either personally or by appointing a responsible individual, directly to the Admitting Office as soon as practicable. If an autopsy is in order, Pathology will pick up the consent in Admitting.

3. Death Certificates:

Death certificates must be completed promptly based on clinical information available at the time of death. Death certificates are available in the EDDRS, and it is this providers responsibility to ensure that they are completed properly and promptly.

4. Medical Examiner's Cases:

- a. It is the responsibility of the pronouncing physician to contact the Medical Examiner in all cases that might involve his office. Notification for Medical Examiner must be accomplished prior to asking for an autopsy.
- b. Cases falling within the jurisdiction of the Medical Examiner:
 - 1) Violent death whether by criminal violence, suicide or casualty
 - 2) Death caused by an unlawful act or criminal neglect
 - 3) Death occurring in a suspicious, unusual or unexplained manner.
 - 4) Death caused by suspected criminal abortion.
 - 5) Death while unattended by a physician, so far as can be discovered, or where no physician is able to certify as to the cause of death.
 - 6) Death of a person confined in a public institution other than a hospital, infirmary, or nursing home.
 - 7) Death occurring in the operating room.

5. Fetal Death Certificates:

Fetal death certificates are completed in the OB/GYN office in accordance with existing procedures. New York State law states that all products of conception have a fetal death certificate. Examination of such a fetus by the Pathology Department requires a valid signed autopsy consent form; the mother's signature is mandatory, the father's signature is optional. A fetus of less than 20 weeks gestation (less than 16 cm in crown-rump length and less than 25 cm in crown-heel length) is submitted to the Pathology Department as a surgical specimen. All intact fetus' require autopsy consent.

6. Anatomical Gifts:

Consent forms for anatomical gifts are available from the nursing staff on the patient floors.

7. Valuables:

All valuables should be sent to the Financial Office during normal working hours. During the evening and night, all valuables should be sent to Admitting who will forward them to Financial when they are open. Thus, the family should always be directed to the Financial Office for valuables. Personal items, including clothes, will be taken care of in Admitting Office. No valuables are to be sent to Pathology.

8. Labeling of the Body:

All bodies will be labeled to indicate the identity by a hospital wrist band or toe tag. The wrist band or toe tag must be securely attached. The identification band or tag will include the following information:

- a. Patient's name.
- b. Hospital number

9. Movement of Body to Z-Lab:

Nursing personnel must expedite movement of body to Z-Lab. From 8:00 p.m. to 9:00 a.m., the Admission Office will contact the floor to ensure that the body has been moved to Z-Lab whenever Pathology personnel are being called in to perform an autopsy.

10. Arrival of a Patient in Extremis to Emergency Department (extracted from the ED policy):

For patients pronounced dead within the RGH Emergency Department, The Monroe County Medical Examiner's Office will be contacted for all patients falling within the following criteria:

- a. All trauma related deaths
- b. All pediatric deaths (age <19)
- c. All suspicious deaths, such as:
 - 1) Recent hospitalization
 - 2) Recent procedures
 - 3) Unusual circumstances

In cases meeting these criteria but not accepted by the Medical Examiner's Office, then the family consent should be sought. Deaths falling outside of these criteria **do not** require a request for autopsy.

Addendum: In the event the deceased patient's family or proxy requests/demands an autopsy (and case has not been accepted by the Medical Examiner's office), the following procedure will be utilized:

- a. Emergency Department physician caring for the patient at the time of death contacts the ED Medical Director (or covering designee):
- b. Emergency Department Medical Director (or designee) will:
 - 1) Review the specifics of the case with the Emergency Department physician
 - 2) Collaborate with RGH Pathologist on call and facilitate and resolve such cases.

11. Release of Bodies:

Morgue personnel will release bodies during their normal working hours. Security personnel are responsible for releasing bodies during off-duty hours. Admitting will page Security personnel and inform them whenever an undertaker has arrived for receipt of a body during off-duty hours.