



Clinical Staff Executive Committee

MEDICAL CENTER POLICY NO. 0270

- A. SUBJECT: Autopsy
- B. EFFECTIVE DATE: January 1, 2013 (Rvd)
- C. POLICY:

An autopsy shall be performed when the family requests an autopsy, the death falls within the jurisdiction of the Medical Examiner and/or the attending physician requests an autopsy.

D. PROCEDURE:

1. No autopsy shall be performed without written consent of an authorized representative unless inquiry or examination by the Medical Examiner is required by Virginia law. An authorized representative includes the deceased person's spouse, family members, legal guardian and other individual who has been delegated decision-making authority under a written document such as a Power of Attorney or Advance Directive.
2. An attending physician shall seek consent for performing an autopsy in all cases that fall under the following criteria established by the College of American Pathologists:
 - Unanticipated death or death following unexpected medical complications
 - Death occurring while the patient is being treated under a new therapeutic trial regimen
 - Death occurring during, or within 48 hours of, a dental, surgical or invasive diagnostic procedure
 - Death incidental to pregnancy or within 7 days following delivery
 - Death in infants/children with congenital malformations
 - The physician has not made a firm diagnosis, or the cause is sufficiently obscure to delay completion of the death certificate
 - There are concerns about a hereditary disease that might affect other family members
 - There are concerns for the possible spread of contagious disease
 - The family requests an autopsy
 - Other instances in which the physician feels that an autopsy should be performed
3. Required notification of Medical Examiner
 - a. The Medical Examiner of the county or city in which the death occurs shall be notified of any death that occurs:

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- from trauma, injury, violence, poisoning, accident, suicide or homicide, regardless of the duration of hospitalization or survival following the underlying injury
- when unattended by a physician
- in jail, other correctional institution, police custody or state mental health or mental retardation facility
- suddenly as an apparent result of fire
- in any suspicious, unusual or unnatural manner
- in any infant less than 18 months of age whose death is suspected to be attributable to sudden infant death syndrome

Following such notification, the Medical Examiner is required by Virginia law to take charge of the dead body and investigate the cause and manner of the death. The Medical Examiner is authorized to inspect and copy the pertinent medical records of the decedent whose death is under investigation.

- b. Good faith efforts shall be made to identify the next of kin of the decedent and such identification, if available, shall be provided to the Medical Examiner upon transfer of the body.
4. The physician in attendance at the time of the patient's death shall:
 - a. determine whether the death falls under the jurisdiction of the Medical Examiner;
 - b. obtain authorization for organ donation, if applicable, in compliance with [Medical Center Policy No. 0098 "Organ, Tissue and Eye Donation"](#); and
 - c. complete documentation of the request for an autopsy (in all cases that are not Medical Examiner cases or required by court order) and place documentation in the medical record
 5. Scope and process of autopsy
 - a. The scope of the autopsy shall be sufficient to answer all questions posed by the attending physician and by the pathologist, as agreed to by the family upon review of the clinical database.
 - b. The autopsy report shall include a summary of the clinical history, diagnoses, gross descriptions, microscopic descriptions and a final summary that contains a clinical/pathologic correlation.
 - c. The autopsy findings shall be promptly communicated to the attending physician along with all additional information the pathologist considers relevant to the case. The referring physician, as applicable, shall be notified of the results of the autopsy.
 - d. The results of autopsies will be monitored as part of performance improvement.
 6. The attending physician shall be notified whenever an autopsy is to be performed and will inform the patient care team as indicated.

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SIGNATURE:



Robert S. Gibson, M.D., President Clinical Staff



R. Edward Howell, CEO, UVA Medical Center



DATE:

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Approved May 2006
Revised December 2009
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Approved by Patient Care Committee
Approved by Clinical Staff Executive Committee