



## Milwaukee County Office of Emergency Management (OEM)

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# Numbered Notice

**Number:** 17-07  
**Date:** March 24, 2017  
**From:** Ken Sternig  
**Section:** EMS Administration  
**To:** EMS Providers  
**Subject:** Notification of Medical Examiner's Office of deaths occurring in the field  
**Purpose:** Clarification of operational policy

As part of the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) – EMS Division's continual collaboration with the Milwaukee County Medical Examiner's (ME) Office, it has been identified that there has been an increase of cases where EMS providers are leaving the scene prior to notifying the ME.

The OEM-EMS Management of Deceased Patients (see attachment), requires that EMS providers call the ME to notify them of a death **before leaving the scene**. This requirement shall be carried out whether there was a resuscitation attempted or not. If an ALS unit is on the scene and has assessed or cared for the patient, they should call the ME. If no ALS unit is on scene, the call should be made by a BLS unit.

It is very important that a call be made prior to the EMS unit leaving the scene so the EMS providers can provide a firsthand account of the scene and patient history. If the Medical Examiner's Office cannot be reached (ex. rare occasions on 3<sup>rd</sup> shift if all ME staff are out on other calls) the ME's Office asks that the following information be left on their answering machine:

- Date
- Name of EMS provider calling
- EMS vehicle number
- Patient's name
- Patient's age
- Pronouncing physician (OLMC or EMS Medical Director's name) if resuscitation attempted
- Time patient pronounced if resuscitation was attempted



**Universal Care:  
MANAGEMENT OF DECEASED PATIENTS  
Operational Policy**

**POLICY:** Deceased patients will be managed in a professional and respectful manner, to meet the needs of the community, under the guidelines developed in conjunction with the Milwaukee County Medical Examiner's Office.

**DEFINITIONS:**

**Resuscitation attempt:** Initiation of basic or advanced life support procedures in an attempt to reverse cardiac arrest of medical or traumatic origin. These procedures include, but are not limited to, CPR, placement of an advanced airway, cardiac monitoring/defibrillation.

**Suspicious death:** Patient's death is considered to be from other than natural causes, including suspected sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), crimes, suicide, and accidental death.

**Non-suspicious death:** Patient's death is apparently due to natural causes.

**Potential crime scene:** A location where any part of a criminal act occurred, where evidence relating to a crime may be found, or suspicions of a criminal act may have occurred.

**PROCEDURE:**

Resuscitation will be initiated on all patients in cardiac arrest, unless one of the following conditions is met:

- Decapitation
- Rigor mortis
- Tissue decomposition
- Dependent lividity
- Valid State of Wisconsin Do-Not-Resuscitate order or Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment
- Fire victim with full-thickness burns to 90% or greater body surface area

A patient may be pronounced en route to a hospital if condition warrants. In such case, the destination should be changed to the Medical Examiner's Office.

EMS unit should notify the Medical Examiner prior to redirecting transport.

The EMS unit (ALS or BLS) responsible for assessing (no resuscitation attempted) or treating (resuscitation attempted) shall call the Medical Examiner's Office to provide a firsthand account of the scene and patient history **before leaving the scene.**

If the Medical Examiner's Office cannot be reached, the ME has requested that at a minimum the following information should be left on the ME phone message:

- Date
- Name of EMS provider calling
- EMS vehicle number
- Patient's name
- Patient's age
- Pronouncing physician name (OLMC or EMS Medical Director's name) if resuscitation was attempted
- Time patient was pronounced if resuscitation was attempted



**Universal Care:  
MANAGEMENT OF DECEASED PATIENTS  
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For a potential crime scene:

- Notify law enforcement if not already involved.
- Include potential crime information in report to Medical Examiner's Office.
- Observe, document and report to law enforcement anything unusual at the scene.
- Protect potential evidence
  - Do not "clean up" the body
  - Leave holes in clothing from bullet or stab wounds intact
  - Do not touch or move items at the scene
  - Observe, document and report to law enforcement and the Medical Examiner's Office any items disturbed by EMS at the scene
- Turn the body over to law enforcement
- Law enforcement has the legal responsibility to maintain scene integrity

For all other patients:

- Do not remove lines or tubes from the deceased
- Do not "clean up" the body
- Do not disturb the scene
- If covering the body, use only a clean, disposable blanket

Disposition of the body:

- Do not leave the body unattended
- The body may be turned over to law enforcement, which has the legal responsibility to maintain scene integrity
- If approval is granted by the Medical Examiner's Office, the body may be turned over to a funeral home
- If the resuscitation attempt took place in the ambulance, include the information in your report and transport to the Medical Examiner's Office at 933 West Highland Avenue
  - Do not transfer the body to another transport vehicle unless the municipality would be left with no available responding ALS unit; refer to individual municipal policy
  - If the death is considered suspicious, a police officer or detective may accompany the body in the ambulance to the Medical Examiner's Office to maintain integrity of evidence
- Transport to a funeral home shall be determined by individual municipal policy

Documentation:

A patient care record will be completed for all deceased patients. Documentation will include:

- Pertinent information regarding patient's known medical history.
- Treatment provided; if no treatment was provided, the reason for not initiating a resuscitation attempt.
- The time of determination not to initiate resuscitative measures, or the time CPR was discontinued

A copy of the patient care record is to be forwarded to the Medical Examiner's Office.