



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

Note: Refer to the Traumatic Cardiac Arrest Practice Guideline for pulseless trauma patients not meeting conditions above

A patient may be pronounced en route to a hospital if condition warrants. **In such case, EMS should notify the Medical Examiner, prior to redirecting transport, for determination of final disposition of body (ME office or funeral home). If the death occurred en route, and outside Milwaukee County, the ME may direct you to contact that county's ME office.**

The EMS unit (ALS or BLS) responsible for assessing (no resuscitation attempted) or treating (resuscitation attempted then terminated) shall call the Medical Examiner's Office to provide a firsthand account of the scene and patient history before leaving the scene. This call is mandatory in ALL cases of deceased persons, DOA or TOR.

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**
- **Time of EMS death assessment if no resuscitation was attempted**



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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 **contact the Medical Examiner for determination of final disposition of body**
 - **If directed by the Medical Examiner, transport to the ME 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
- **On rare occasions, with consent of all parties involved, the body may be moved back into the care facility or residence**

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.