

SECTION 10 - HOSPITAL DEATHS

I. HOSPITAL DEATHS-GENERAL

Hospital deaths cover all sections of the hospital; emergency department, surgery and general patient rooms.

A nonviolent death after hospital admission is usually not a Coroner's case. (See **Reporting Criteria** below.) If the probable cause of death can be derived from clinical examination, and if the cause of death is clearly natural, a Coroner's Investigation is unnecessary. However, all deaths following injury or where death apparently occurred as the result of an accident, error or where equipment, medication or other supplies were faulty must be reported.

Rarely is a scene response necessary in deaths occurring in healthcare facilities. One notable exception is in cases of sudden unexpected deaths of infants or children, in which caregiver and witness interviews are best carried out in concert with law enforcement at both the scene in which the child was found ill or unresponsive and at the hospital. Protocols between the county coroner, healthcare facilities, emergency medical services and law enforcement should be clearly established in advance.

If a person dies in a hospital and no next of kin can be identified or located by the hospital staff, the Shelby County Coroner's Office will assume jurisdiction and attempt to locate next of kin. In the event that next of kin cannot be located, the SCCO will handle the disposition of the body and property of the deceased.

II. EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT DEATHS

There is no special criteria for reporting emergency department deaths. Any death, regardless of the circumstances, is reportable to the Shelby County Coroner's Office.

III. OPERATING ROOM DEATHS

All deaths that occur in the operating room, whether due to surgical or anesthetic procedures, are reportable to the Shelby County Coroner's Office. The C/DC will make the decision to assume jurisdiction of the death based on medical history of the patient, the risk associated with the surgery and the general health of the patient. If a patient is in surgery because of trauma or injury and dies while undergoing surgery, the death must be reported and investigated.

V. CORONER'S OFFICE NOTIFICATION PROCEDURE

When a patient has been pronounced dead and one or more of the above **Reporting Criteria** has been met, the Coroner's Office shall be notified.

1. Notify the Coroner's Office using the phone number of 205-669-3846 or through 911 Dispatch at 205-439-6919
2. A C/DC will respond to the notification initially by a telephone.
3. When the C/DC calls, please have information noted above available.
4. Based on the history received, the C/DC will advise if family will be permitted to view the decedent prior to the arrival C/DC.

After pronouncement of death nothing is to be removed from or placed on the decedent.

1. Do not clean the decedent.
2. Do not remove any medical devices such as endotracheal tube, gastric tube, IV's, catheters, chest tubes, etc.
3. Do not remove any clothing or jewelry.
4. All clothing and personal effects removed during treatment should be placed in a bag and the bag should be placed with the decedent.
5. Do not place anything on the decedent. A clean sheet may be used to cover the decedent.

After pronouncement of death, access to the decedent should be restricted.

1. No one should enter the room to view the decedent and/or any injuries prior to the C/DC authorizing the viewing. This restriction includes family, friends, medical personnel, law enforcement and fire department personnel.
2. In the event law enforcement feels an immediate viewing of the decedent is required, they shall call the Shelby County Coroner's Office at (205) 669-4181 or 911 Dispatch at 205-439-6919 and confer with the on-duty C/DC. If a viewing is granted prior to the arrival of the C/DC, the law enforcement official shall not touch or otherwise disturb any artifact on the body.

IF PERSONNEL IS UNCERTAIN IF A DEATH IS A CORONER'S CASE

In the event that the hospital agent is not certain whether a death is reportable, a telephonic consultation shall be made with the C/DC.