

Prescription and Illicit Drugs

Created 01/20/2011
Revised 11/01/2023

Purpose

To identify the proper retention and disposition of prescription and illicit drugs, as well as drug paraphernalia

Policy

It is the policy of the [REDACTED] to handle drugs and drug paraphernalia in a manner that is consistent with local, state and federal laws.

Procedures

Collection

Illicit drugs and drug paraphernalia are not to be collected from the scene by the medical investigator. Please refer to the "Investigations" SOP for additional information. In cases where medications (prescription or over the counter) are present at a death scene and relate to the death, the medical investigator will collect them. All opiates and other prescription medications with a potential for abuse will be collected from death scenes regardless of death type including any case falling under [REDACTED] jurisdiction and in presumed natural release cases prior to the termination of coroner jurisdiction. If patient medications aid in determining a medical diagnosis, the medication name, dates, dosage, and prescribing physician name should be noted and collected. Medications prescribed to someone other than the decedent but suspected to relate to the death will be logged; these may be collected only with the permission of the person to whom they were prescribed. Otherwise, they are to be logged and secured appropriately either by receipting them to the family or by securing them in a safe place. An inventory of the medications being taken is to be done and all information is to be carefully recorded.

Prescription bottles and loose pills identified at the scene shall be recorded as to medication name, placed into numbered clear evidence bags, and sealed at the scene, with law enforcement as witness. Bag number(s) shall be recorded in the ECMS. Upon return to [REDACTED] and in the presence of another [REDACTED] staff member, the medical investigator shall open the evidence bags for complete inventory of the contents including medication name, dates, dosage, prescribed amounts and remaining pill counts; if another staff member is not present, the evidence bags must remain sealed and secured, and follow-up left for medication inventory to occur when appropriate staff members (two individuals) are available. Alternatively, complete inventory and medication count may occur at the scene with law enforcement as witness and providing chain of custody signature. Upon completion of the inventory, the prescription inventory information shall be logged into the ECMS and the medications secured into new, numbered clear evidence bags, with both [REDACTED] staff members signing the chain of custody sheet.

Retention


Following inventory, logging, and securing under documented chain of custody, collected prescription medications shall then be placed in the monitored/restricted access toxicology room in a locked cabinet under the appropriate month in which the death occurred. All evidence bags shall be properly labeled with the deceased person's name, case number, date of collection, and two confirmatory signatures. All medications will be held for 6 months before making a determination for each individual case if they can then be destroyed or are required to be retained until further notice. If for any reason a medication evidence bag must be opened, two [REDACTED] staff members must be present, and documentation made of the new evidence bag seal number upon return to storage.



Retained Drugs

On the first of every month, two on-shift medical investigators shall generate a list from the ECMS of inventoried medications for completed cases with a date of death 6 months prior. All eligible bags will be removed from the locked cabinet and recorded. The electronic case management system will then be accessed for each case and all cases that have been signed out as 'undetermined' or 'homicide' will be retained in a designated locked cabinet, unless destruction is indicated during discussion with the forensic pathologist of record; additional cases may be designated for indefinite retention as well. All medications for 'undetermined' or 'homicide' deaths will be held for 2 years from the date of death or longer if required by the coroner or forensic pathologist. Documentation of all retained medications will be made in the ECMS.

Destruction of Drugs

Destruction of medications after the 6 month holding period will be done by two on-shift medical investigators on the first of every month, after the ECMS has been accessed to determine the final outcome of each case and how the death certificate was signed. Documentation in the electronic case management system will be done as to the investigators names and date of the disposal. All transport and disposal of medications will be performed with two  staff members present. A list of each case having medications collected will be generated from the ECMS; the recorded evidence bag number(s) from the list shall be compared to the actual numbered bags removed from the locked storage cabinet for that month. If there is no indication of tampering with the bag(s) (seal intact), the evidence bag shall be placed directly into the MedSafe collection receptacle and the disposal date documented in the ECMS. Any liquids must be 4 ounces or less. At the time of disposal, any evidence bag that is discovered to have been tampered with or breached shall be immediately delivered to the coroner or forensic pathologist. When the MedSafe inner liner is at capacity, the liner shall be secured in the Final Packaging Pouch under the direction of the coroner or forensic pathologist, and the tamper-proof package stored in the toxicology room until UPS pick-up.

Policy/Procedure Violations

Violations of this policy are grounds for disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Revised Effective: 10/18/2015

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Approved by:

