



## The Palliative Response

### Guidelines for Pronouncement

#### Preparation before Death Pronouncement

- Be prepared to answer pertinent questions
- Nursing staff can provide wealth of information
- Know recent events, family response and dynamics, and special problems or concerns
- Assess immediate situation
  - Death expected or sudden?*
  - Family present or notified?*
  - Attending notified?*
- Autopsy
  - Determine family request*
  - Consider value of autopsy*
- Organ donation
  - If family requests, contact organ donation counselor to discuss details*
- Faith tradition
  - Consider pastoral care contacts*
  - Honor requirements/procedures/rituals*

#### Entering the Room

- Quiet, respectful attitude
- Ask nurse to accompany for introductions
- Introduce yourself and role: “I am the doctor on call”
- Determine relationships of persons present
- Inform family of purpose; invite to them to remain
- Empathize simply:
  - “I am sorry for your loss. This is a difficult time.”*

#### Pronouncement Procedure Clinical Examination

- Check ID bracelet and pulse
- Check pupils for position and response to light
- Check response to tactile stimuli
  - Examine respectfully: No sternal rubs or nipple pinches*
- Check for spontaneous respiration
- Check for heart sound and pulses
- Record time of death

Guidelines for Pronouncement: Side One



**Follow-Up When You Are Patient's Physician**

*Invite family to contact you over the next few days or months if questions arise or problems occur*

**Follow-Up When You Are Physician on Call**

*Assure family you will report death to the attending physician, whom they may contact with questions or concerns*

**Death Note in Chart**

- Date and time
- Name of provider pronouncing death
- Brief statement of cause of death
- Note absence of pulse, respiration, pupil response
- Note if family present or informed
- Note family response if indicated
- Note notification of attending, pastoral care, social work or others as appropriate

**Death Certificate**

- Locate sample death certificate on unit
- Complete marked sections. Write neatly in black ink.
- Begin again if make an error (cross-outs not allowed)
- Cause of death—primary and secondary

Example: Primary: Pneumonia

Secondary: Advanced Alzheimer's Dementia

- “Contributing but not primary” section. List other illnesses possibly linked to patient's disability or service connection (e.g., Agent Orange, Asbestosis)

*Documentation assists family to obtain benefits*

*Families appreciate and respond to a respectful and kind approach to this final medical act*

**If families should contact you later**

*Take time*

*Inquire about family members*

*Listen carefully*

*Respond empathically*

***Death pronouncement is the final medical act.***

***Handle with care.***