

 <p>Halton Healthcare GEORGETOWN · MILTON · OAKVILLE</p>	Death: Nursing Pronouncing Death When Death Is Expected Policy & Procedure			
	Program/Dept.:	Office Of Professional Practice	Document Category:	Patient Care – End of Life
	Developed by:	Professional Practice Clinicians	Original Approval Date:	July 2001
	Approved by:	Palliative Care Committee Director Professional Practice Senior Vice President Patient Engagement and Chief Nursing Executive	Reviewed Date:	July 2004
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1.0 Purpose

To provide guidance on nursing pronouncing death when death is expected.

2.0 Scope

Nurses employed at Halton Healthcare

3.0 Policy

- 3.1 Nurses may pronounce death when death is expected when 2 criteria are met:
 - a. There is a No CPR – Comfort Care order on the patient health record
 - b. There is a Provider order that states “nurse may pronounce expected death as needed”

- 3.2 When expected death occurs the nurse must confirm:
 - a. Vital signs have ceased (pulseless at apex and absent respirations) and the pupils are fixed and dilated
 - b. The death of the patient is anticipated by the patient, the family and the health care team
 - c. Expected death has been discussed and documented by Provider in patient health record

- 3.3 The pronouncement of death is the determination that, based on a physical assessment, life has ceased. There is no legal requirement preventing a nurse from pronouncing death. There is no legal definition of pronouncing death and there is no legal requirement for a physician to pronounce death.

- 3.4 In situations where death is unexpected, the Physician must be notified in order to pronounce death, to determine the cause, to assess need for involvement of Coroner and to sign the Medical Certificate of Death.

- 3.5 A Physician must complete the Medical Certificate of Death including documenting the cause of death, dating and signing the certificate.

- 3.6 In certain situations, even though the death was expected, the Coroner may need to be notified, as outlined in the [Death: Coroner’s Cases Policy and Procedure](#).

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4.0 Procedure

- 4.1. At the time of death, the nurse will assess that vital signs have ceased by confirming that there are no heart sounds at the apex, no pulse, absence of respirations, and pupils are fixed and dilated.
- 4.2. The nurse will have another nurse or physician verify the assessment of death and document the second verifier in patient's health record.
- 4.3. The nurse will document assessments that confirmed the death and the second person verifying the death.
- 4.4. Refer to the [Death: After Death Care Policy and Procedure](#) for care of the patient after death has occurred.

5.0 Definitions

- 5.1 **Expected Death:** An expected death is a death that was reasonably anticipated by the patient, the family, and the health care team. The death has been discussed with the patient and/or family as appropriate.
- 5.2 **End-of-life Care:** care for patients who are expected to die in the foreseeable future and for their families. It includes helping patients and their families to prepare for death, ensuring their comfort and supporting decision making that is consistent with the patient's prognosis and goals of care.
- 5.3 **Pronouncing Death:** declaring death has occurred. There is no legal definition of pronouncing death and no legal requirement for the physician to pronounce death.

6.0 Related Documents

Death: After Death Care Policy and Procedure
Death: Coroner's Cases Policy and Procedure
Death: Neurological Determination of Death Policy and Procedure
Death: Nursing Pronouncing Death When Death Is Expected Policy and Procedure
Death: Neonatal Death and Stillbirth Policy and Procedure
Iodine 131 In-Patient Therapy Policy and Procedure
Organ and Tissue Donation Policy and Procedure
Provision of Appropriate Treatment
Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) Policy and Procedure

8.0 Key Words

Death, expected death, pronouncing death, pronounce

9.0 Reviewed by/Consultation with

Palliative Care Clinicians
Professional Practice Clinicians
Ethicist
Coroner

Death: Nursing Pronouncing Death When Death Is Expected Policy & Procedure

10.0 References

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health-safety/home-community-care/care-options-and-cost/expectedplanned-home-deaths/expected_home_death.pdf

https://rnao.ca/sites/rnao-ca/files/bpg/PALLATIVE_CARE_WEB_I_0.pdf

<https://ppno.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Care-of-the-Body-After-Death.pdf>

<https://www.cno.org/fr/exercice-de-la-profession/outils-educatifs/ask-practice/can-an-rn-or-rpn-pronounce-death-when-death-has-occurred/>

<https://www.cmpa-acpm.ca/en/advice-publications/browse-articles/2016/completing-medical-certificates-of-death-who-s-responsible>