

# POLICY : DEATH AT A CLINIC

ITEM H 42-2002  
MC 05.12.2002

## PROPOSED POLICY FOR A DEATH AT A CLINIC

### RESOLVED:

- (a) **That** the proposed policy pertaining to a death at a clinic as set out in the report, **BE NOTED**.
- (b) **That** the proposed policy pertaining to a death at a clinic as set out in the report, **BE APPROVED** as policy of the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality after it **HAS BEEN SCRUTINIZED** from a legal perspective.

## **PROPOSED POLICY FOR A DEATH AT A CLINIC**

### **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

The purpose of this policy is to set guidelines for dealing with a body at the clinic in order to facilitate the removal of the body as soon as possible for appropriate storage. The death may occur at the facility or prior to the arrival at the facility. The family must be notified so that further arrangements can be made.

### **BACKGROUND**

According to the Emergency service regulations ambulances do not transport dead bodies. The clinics do not have storage space for bodies therefore a death at the clinic or the arrival of a person who is dead is a problem for the staff at the clinic. According to the Nursing Act, nurses may not certify a person as dead, a medical practitioner must be called to certify the body as dead and the SAP need to be called to remove the body for storage and investigation if necessary. It is noted that mortuary accommodation is inadequate.

### **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

#### **Natural Causes**

Natural cause of death is any case where the death is solely and exclusively the result of a natural disease process, not precipitated by trauma, anaesthetic or therapeutic mishap.

#### **Non Natural Cause Of Death**

Death caused by reasons other than natural eg. Trauma, accident, homicide, suicide. Death caused by external factors eg penicillin anaphylaxis, under a local or general anaesthetic or other substance taken into the body. Death occurred due to natural causes but where negligence is suspected. An act or omission may have been performed by a second party which contributed to the death.

#### **Death Certification**

An official statement of the cause, date and place of a person's death signed by a medical practitioner.

#### **Still Birth**

Birth of a dead child (put in weeks to differentiate abortion/miscarriage).

### **LEGAL SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

Health Act, No 63 of 1977

Nursing act, No 50 of 1978

Midwifery Act

Scope of Practice for Professional Nurses

Emergency Medical Services Ambulance Circular No 10 of 1998

Ambulance Circular Annexure A No 11, 12 and 13 of 2000

Ambulance Circular 3 of 1993 Addendum 3

Births, Marriages and Deaths Registration Act

Inquest Act 1959 (Act 58 of 1959)

SAPS Service

Regulations relating to Funeral Undertakers

## **POLICY**

This policy is comprehensive and will include deaths due to natural causes, deaths due to unnatural causes and still births. A medical practitioner will have to be available to attend to all deaths that occur at the health facilities in the Metro. Exceptions can be made in the case of stillbirth.

### **Death due to Natural Causes**

If the medical practitioner examines the corpse and is satisfied that the death is due to natural causes, he/she shall issue the prescribed death certificate. This shall apply whether the medical practitioner was treating the person prior to death or not. This shall also apply whether the death was sudden and unexpected or not.

### **Death due to Unnatural Causes**

Where the medical officer after examining the corpse is of the opinion that the death was caused by unnatural causes or by the acts or omissions of another party, a death certificate shall NOT be issued, the SAP should be notified immediately for removal and the necessary investigations

### **Stillbirths**

A doctor or midwife at the delivery of a stillbirth may certify the death or make a declaration of the death

## **REMOVAL OF THE CORPSE**

The corpse shall be stored appropriately and out of the sight of the public until removal. No unauthorized person may remove the body from the health facility. Unknown corpses are to be removed to the Government mortuary only. The family may request that the corpse be removed to the Government mortuary. Corpses identified to be indigent are to be removed to the Government mortuary. No private undertaker may remove a corpse without the permission of the family and signatures must be obtained. No private undertakers, staff or associates may linger around the health facility

## **PROCEDURES AND ROLES**

The full procedure shall be documented in the facility procedure manual. Special attention shall be given to the dignity of the person even in death, unidentified corpses, indigent corpses, and the notification of the family and the storage of the personal effects.

### **Nursing Personnel**

- Remove the corpse to a private place
- Inform the medical officer of the presence of a corpse
- Prepare the corpse for examination by the medical officer
- Complete still birth certification according to legislation/registration/notification
- Store the corpse adequately until removal
- Inform the family if the details are known
- Notify the SAP if necessary
- Label the corpse if the details are known
- Keep a record at the facility of the incident according to the legal requirements
- Ensure removal by authorized people
- Ensure that no personnel from the Metro act on behalf of the interests of any undertaker
- Guide families to make choices by providing them with information they may be seeking

**Medical Practitioner**

- Examine the corpse
- Record findings according to law
- Fill in the death certificate and other documentation necessary/registration/ notification
- Notify the family/relatives if details are known
- Notify SAP if necessary
- If the corpse is unable to be identified, the SAP should be notified and requested to remove the corpse to a Government mortuary

**The Family**

- Produce identification to prove relationship with the deceased
- Sign consent form for the removal of the corpse
- Arrange for the removal of the corpse to a mortuary of their choice
- Pay for services rendered after removal from the health facility if necessary

**The Police Services**

- Removal of the corpse to the Government mortuary for storage and post-mortem if necessary
- Opening of necessary docket if an unnatural cause of death is suspected

**The Undertaker Services**

- Removal of an identified corpse on the request and with the permission and signature of a family member.
- No pressure on the family to use private undertakers shall be allowed
- Accurate records of the removal of a corpse to be kept for every body removed with the identification of the undertakers.