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<b>Subject:</b>	AUTOPSY PROTOCOL				
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## AUTOPSY PROTOCOL

**PURPOSE:** Provide instruction to staff for preparing body and obtaining proper consent for autopsy on a deceased patient.

**POLICY:**

1. At the time of pronouncement of death of a patient by a physician, the physician determines if an autopsy is to be requested. This decision is made after consultation with the pathologist on call who then has the ultimate authority for determining whether or not the autopsy will be performed. Certain cases may be deemed inappropriate and thereby deferred. This is a medical consultation and must be requested by the physician after consulting with the on call pathologist with the approval of the next of kin. Once it is determined that an autopsy will be performed, then the nurse in charge should then be informed. .
2. **No lines, tubes, drains, or dressings are to be removed prior to the autopsy.**
3. Consent for an autopsy must be obtained from the person nearest of kin to the deceased who is responsible for burial. Next of kin will be determined by the following order of preference:
  - a) If married, surviving spouse; if spouse is deceased or incompetent, then
  - b) Adult children (preferably the oldest child, but not necessarily so); if none, then
  - c) Parents/legal guardian; if none, then
  - d) Adult grandchildren; if none, then
  - e) Brothers or sisters; if none, then
  - f) Nephews or nieces; if none, then
  - g) Grandparents; if none, then
  - h) Uncles or aunts; if none, then
  - i) Cousins; if none, then
  - j) Step children; if none, then
  - k) Relatives or next of kin of previously deceased spouse; if none, then
  - l) Any other relative or friend who will be assuming custody of the body for burial.
4. The attending physician is responsible for approaching the family and obtaining the Consent for Autopsy (MedEx). The consent form, **must be completed in its entirety,**

- and requires the signature of two (2) witnesses. Witnesses and persons giving consent must be at least eighteen years of age. If the nature and extent of the autopsy are to be limited in any way, those **limitations must be clearly stated on the consent form.**
5. Verbal permission, telephonic or otherwise, by the legal custodian of the body is valid, but consent should be written when possible. If permission is verbal via telephone, permit should be signed for the legal custodian by two professional persons familiar with the patient's care (nurses, attending physician, etc.) receiving verbal authority, with documentation noted on the autopsy permit.
  6. It is always preferable for both parents to give consent for an autopsy on a child, but if one is in the service, divorced or otherwise unavailable, one parent's signature suffices. If the parents are separated, the one with custody of the child has the right of giving consent. If the mother is a minor, she may give consent for an autopsy upon her child, even if she is not legally married. The grandparents should not be asked to do it for her.
  7. If consent for an autopsy is obtained, the attending physician or the administrative nursing supervisor should notify both the pathologist on call and the Pathology Administration Office immediately. This may be accomplished by calling the Pathology Administration Office at Ext. 16026 during regular office hours or the main Laboratory Office at Ext.17990. The regular hours of the Pathology Department are 0700 to 1800 Monday-Friday and 0700 to 1500 on Saturday.
  8. Once completed, signed, and witnessed, the consent form should be placed on the patient's chart. The chart is taken to the Pathology Administration Office. After normal working hours, the chart should be taken to the main clinical lab office.
  9. The body should be transported to the morgue and placed in the cooler. When you arrive at the morgue, use the telephone adjacent to the morgue to call Security at Ext. 16006. The employee will use their badge to identify themselves by "swiping" the access control station adjacent to the morgue. When identification is confirmed, Security will open the door.
  10. When the autopsy is complete, the Pathology Administrative Office will notify the PBX operator. The PBX operator will notify the funeral home that the body may be picked up. If there has not been a funeral home designated or if there is a delay in the funeral home picking up the body, the PBX operator will notify the proper floor. Orderlies will then be notified and instructed to place the body in the cooler.
  11. If the autopsy is to be performed outside this facility, the Pathology Department will assist with appropriate referral.
  12. For **fetuses, stillborns, and neonates**, see Labor and Delivery unit specific policy.
  13. Pathologists will attempt to complete routine cases in approximately 30 working days and approximately three months for more complicated cases. The provisional diagnosis, in most cases, will be completed within two working days and sent to Health Information Management and attending physicians.

#### **PROCEDURE:**

1. At the time of pronouncement of death, ascertain if there is to be an autopsy.
2. **Do not remove any lines, tubes, drains, or dressings.**
3. Allow family to have time with body if desired. Provide emotional and spiritual support. Give all personal belongings to family and document. A hospital employee should remain in attendance.
4. Identification tags should have patient information label applied. Attach tags to the personal belongings bag, the toe of body, and the zipper pull of morgue bag.
5. Transport body to morgue and place in cooler and record in logbook.
6. Transport entire chart to Pathology Administrative office.

**EDUCATION:** The physician is primarily responsible for educating the family regarding an autopsy.

**DOCUMENTATION:**

1. The Consent to Autopsy form must be completed by the physician and appropriate family member and placed in the chart.
2. Document time and by whom body was transported to morgue/holding area.
3. Document contents of personal belongings bag and to which family member it was given.

**RELATED INFORMATION – NURSING POLICY/PROCEDURE(S):**

- Death: Care of Body, Policy No. 3214
- Death: Medical Examiners Case, Policy No. 3216