Subject: Autopsy

Purpose: To provide guidelines when autopsy is considered following death.

Policy: Permission for autopsies may be obtained by attending physician or registered nurse. Approved autopsies will be performed by Medical Examiner or UIHC Department Pathology Decedent Care Center – Autopsy Services

Additional Information:

1. Obtain autopsy permit on “Consent for Post Mortem” form MR-44. 3 copies are needed. Original permit remains with the patient’s chart, one permit goes to the funeral home, and one permit is for the pathologist.

2. Only one signature is necessary. Permission must be obtained by a person having right to consent. (See provisions of Iowa Code below).

3. Questions or concerns should be directed to attending physician.

4. Contact the UIHC Autopsy Medical Director (or designee) to discuss the case.
   Marcus Nashelsky, MD       UIHC Decedent Care Center
   200 Hawkins Drive – 5244C RCP 200 Hawkins Drive – E140 GH
   Iowa city, Iowa 52242  Iowa City, Iowa 52242
   (319) 353-7594 (319-467-7000)

5. If the case is accepted, contact the UIHC Decedent Care Center at (319) 467-7000 to arrange for fax transmittal of the necessary forms.

6. Complete all forms and obtain the necessary signatures:
   • H4 (adult or pediatric) autopsy consent form –
     Front: patient demographics, death information, consent for autopsy
     Back: clinical history, autopsy questions and physician contact info
   • Inventory of Personal Effects – required if effects will accompany the body.

7. Collect all relevant medical records and forms for transmittal to UIHC with the body. Include records from the referring physician/institution as well as any other recently visited physicians/practices. Medical records MUST accompany the body for review by the pathologist prior to performing the autopsy.

8. Provide billing information – the referring institution will be billed except for rare non-ME cases of death outside an institution where the family desires autopsy.

9. Funeral home should be notified with consideration of pending autopsy. Arrange for transportation of the body, forms and records (not paid for by UIHC). Ensure that the body is properly identified (wristband or toe tag MUST be attached to the body) and that the body is properly contained in a body bag.
10. Body to be taken to morgue for refrigeration by special body transport cart and placed on appropriate autopsy cart.

11. Transfer the body, forms and medical records to the transporting agent. Contact the UIHC Decedent Care Center at (319) 467-7000 to notify the UIHC staff that the body, forms and records are on the way. Also indicate who will be delivering the body and approximately when.

12. The Code of Iowa, Chapter 141.35 entitled “Post-mortem Examinations” outlines the manner in which consent for a post mortem examination may be obtained. It reads: “An autopsy or post mortem examination may be performed upon the body of a deceased person by a physician or surgeon whenever the written consent thereto has been obtained in any of the following manners:

a. By written authorization signed by the deceased during the lifetime.

b. By written consent of any party whom the deceased during his lifetime designated by written instrument to take charge of his body for burial.

c. By consent of decedent’s surviving spouse.

d. If the surviving spouse is incompetent, unavailable or does not claim the body for burial, or if there is no surviving spouse, by consent of an adult child, parent, brother, or sister of the decedent. The consent of any one of such persons shall be sufficient provided that such autopsy shall not be performed under a consent given by one of such persons, if before such autopsy is performed, any of said others shall object in writing to the physician or surgeon by whom the autopsy is to be performed.

e. If none of the above persons is available to claim the body, then by consent of any other relative or friend who assumes custody of the body for burial.

13. The provisions of this section shall not be applicable to any post mortem or scientific examination performed under authority of Section 339.22 whether made under a summons by a coroner or by the coroner himself if he be a physician.

a. If consent is obtained by telephone, two people must listen on the line and then sign a statement as to party giving consent, etc., and time of message. The person giving consent should write a letter verifying the conversation immediately.

b. If there is a known controversy among those having equal rights of consent, then the post mortem examination should not be performed.

c. If the consent has not been obtained, but is contemplated and the post mortem examination cannot be started, body may be kept indefinitely in morgue refrigerator.

d. In case of doubt on any of the points above, consult the Pathologist.

e. Never obtain consent under duress.

f. This consent must be filed with the Department of Pathology.