<table>
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<tr>
<th>NAME OF DOCUMENT</th>
<th>Procedure for Assessment and Documentation to Verify Death - Palliative Care Community Nurses</th>
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<td>KEY TERMS</td>
<td>Assessment, verify, Palliative Care Community Nurse, death, extinction of life,</td>
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<tr>
<td>SUMMARY</td>
<td>The purpose of the procedure is to provide clinical guidance to ensure that the assessment and documentation to verify death in the palliative care setting complies with legal and legislative framework.</td>
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1. POLICY STATEMENT

This document is a procedural guide to NSW Health PD2015_040 Death – Verification of Death and Medical Certificate of Cause of Death. The purpose of this policy is to outline the processes for the assessment and documentation to verify death (previously referred to as extinction of life) by qualified community palliative care (CPC) registered nurses employed by NSW Health. These nurses will be able to verify and document that death has occurred for patients who have been receiving palliative care by a NSW public health service or facility and where death is expected at home.

2. BACKGROUND

This procedure comes into place when a medical practitioner is unavailable to attend and issue a death certificate and when the death of the client was expected as a result of their life limiting condition.

The circumstances where a medical practitioner must assess life extinct include but are not limited to, situations where:

- The cause of death is unclear
- There is uncertainty as to whether life is extinct
- Medical tests need to be undertaken to pronounce life extinct (eg, brain death).

(Refer to PD2010_054 Coroners Cases and the Coroners Act 2009)

This policy is in accordance with the NSW Health Policy Directive Death - Verification of Death and Medical Certificate of Cause of Death

2.1 Public health organisations is defined in Section 7 of the Health Services Act 1997 as:

- A local health district and specialty health network
- A statutory health corporation
- An affiliated health organisation in respect of its recognised establishments and recognised services.

2.2 Legal and legislative framework

NSW legislation relevant to this policy directive:

- Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1995
- Coroners Act 2009
- Human Tissue Act 1983
- Health Services Act 1997.

2.3 Policy framework

NSW Health policy documents relevant to this policy directive:

- PD2010_054 Coroners Cases and the Coroners Act 2009
- Deceased Organ and Tissue Donation - Consent and Other Procedural Requirements PD2013_001
Procedural Requirements
- Conduct of Anatomical Examinations and Anatomy Licensing in NSW PD2011_052

NSW Health State Forms relevant to this policy directive:
- Attending Practitioners Cremation Certificate (Public Health Regulation, 2012, Clause 81)
- Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (SMR010.509)
- IB2010_058 Coronal Checklist (SMR010.513)
- Verification of Death (SMR010.530)
- Death Certification Arrangements for Expected Home Death (SMR010.531)

3. VERIFICATION OF DEATH

3.1. CPC registered nurses will:
- CPC nurses who may be required to document and perform assessment of death must use the state wide Verification of Death form SMR010530 (see Appendix 2)
- Document the correct procedure in the patient’s medical record
- Place a copy of the SMR010530 into the patient’s medical record
- Complete the HETI online module: Verification of Death. Course code 98564783.

3.2. Line Managers/ District Managers/ Service Managers will:
- Ensure education and training is provided to CPC registered nurses who may be required to perform Verification of Death assessment to ensure that they have the knowledge (including legislation requirements regarding notification of cause of death) and clinical assessment skills to perform the extinction of life procedure
- Ensure all CPC registered nurses complete the HETI online module: Verification of Death. Course code 98564783
- Ensure that auditing practices are routinely undertaken in line with PD 213 Death Screening in SESIAHS.

4. CLINICAL PROCEDURE FOR VERIFYING DEATH

4.1. The Expected Death
Prior to the death of a palliative care client in the home the CPC registered nurse will, where ever possible, have outlined the procedure to the family/carer and informed a Medical Practitioner of the patient’s deteriorating condition.

Patients who are planning a home death will have a plan documented in the Community Health Information Management Enterprise (CHIME) and on the afterhours At Risk List.

The following is to be undertaken when:
A CPC registered nurse attends a home visit at the request of the carer/family member following the expected death of a palliative care client and a Medical Practitioner is not
available to certify death. The Palliative Care Consultant or registrar and the After Hours Nurse Manager should be notified.

This is done by demonstrating all of the following:

- No palpable carotid pulse, and
- No heart sounds heard for two minutes, and
- No breath sounds heard for two minutes, and
- Fixed and dilated pupils, and
- No response to centralised stimulus, and
- No motor (withdrawal) response or facial grimace in response to painful stimulus.

## 5. DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS BY THE COMMUNITY PALLIATIVE CARE NURSE WHEN A PATIENT DIES AT HOME

- Please see the flow chart at Appendix 1 for a summary of the process.

### 5.1. Medical certification following Verification of Death

- A medical practitioner must complete the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death within 48 hours of death
- The contact details of the medical practitioner who will complete the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death should be included in the Verification of Death form to ensure this occurs
- For patients cared for at home where death is anticipated (eg, patients known to NSW Health palliative care and affiliated or contracted palliative care services or hospital in the home patients with a resuscitation plan in place), it is recommended that there is agreement in advance on who will complete the medical certification of death
- In such cases, the patient’s general practitioner may agree to this responsibility.

## 6. AUDIT


## 7. REFERENCES

- Academy of Medical Royal Colleges 2008, A Code of Practice for the Diagnosis and confirmation of Death, PPG Design and Print Ltd
- Government of Western Australia, Department of Health 2014. Assessment of the Extinction of Life and the Certification of Death.

Published by the Emergency Care Institute, Agency for Clinical Innovation (website accessed 2014)
8. REVISION AND APPROVAL HISTORY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Revision No.</th>
<th>Author and Approval</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Kim Rigg</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 2016</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Palliative Care Working Party and SESLHD Directors of Palliative Care</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 2016</td>
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<td>Revisions made by Kim Rigg - deleted obsolete Area Policy Directive PD094 Death – Reports to Coroner. Included information in regard to HETI online module Verification of Death.</td>
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<td>Approved C&amp;QC meeting – April 2016</td>
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APPENDIX 1 - Roles and Responsibilities for documentation when a patient dies at home.

Person apparently dead

On assessment by community palliative care nurse, life is extinct

Cause of death uncertain or possible NSW coroner case

YES

Medical Practitioner to assess life extinct. If a Medical Officer is not available the police and/or ambulance would be notified.

Community palliative care nurse to undertake appropriate management of body where attendance of medical practitioner may be delayed. NSW Health Policy Directive PD2010_54 Coroners Cases and the Coroners Act 2009

NO

Notify Medical Practitioner if available

If no medical Practitioner is available to complete the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) at the patient’s home the community palliative care nurse will perform a full clinical examination to life extinct as per policy PD2015_40 Death - Verification of Death and Medical Certificate of Cause of Death

Community palliative care nurse to document the details of clinical assessment- Appendix 2
Original to be given to the family to give to the funeral director.
Copy to be placed in medical record

Within 48 hours Medical Practitioner must complete the medical certificate of cause of death to provide cause of death to Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages. Alternatively provide the MCCD to the funeral director.

COMPLIANCE WITH THIS DOCUMENT IS MANDATORY
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