



MONTGOMERY COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

MCFRS/MCPD Joint Actions after Pronouncement of Death Checklist: Effective: September 1, 2015

The following form may be useful for data collection following incidents of non-suspicious, natural deaths occurring outside of a healthcare facility.

Decedent Information:

- Name: _____ DOB: _____
- Medical Hx: _____
- _____
- Medications⁽¹⁾: _____
- Next of Kin: Name: _____ Relation: _____ Phone: _____
- Time last seen: _____ By: _____
- Physician: _____ Physician Phone: _____
- If contacted, is PMD willing to sign the death certificate? N/A Yes No

MCFRS Provider that pronounced death:

- Name: _____ Rank: _____
- Unit #: _____ Incident #: _____
- Contact/Station Phone #: _____ Time Pronounced: _____
- Additional FRS personnel on scene: _____

Scene Information:

- Position⁽²⁾ and location of body when discovered: _____
- Obvious rigor mortis, lividity, or trauma: _____
- Evidence of disability (wheelchair, adapted toilet, etc.): _____
- Lighting and thermostat settings: _____
- Blood/bodily fluid beyond immediate area of body: _____
- Weapons/implements within reach of body: _____
- Status of windows/doors: _____
- Other relevant information: _____

Notifications:

- Homicide/Major Crimes: _____ Patient's Physician: _____
- Medical Examiner: _____ Funeral Home: _____
- Other : _____

(1) If possible, note dosage and how often taken

(2) E.g.: Prone/supine/left lateral recumbent

Supporting the Bereaved

“Breaking The News” (of sudden or unexpected death)

For any death, “breaking the news” is perhaps the most important part of the EMT’s duties. The family members will probably remember the manner in which it is done many years after the death of a loved one. It can also be extremely stressful for the provider. The suggestions below may be helpful:

- Empathy: Drawing on your own experiences of loss, try to appreciate some of what the survivor is going through, but recognize that everyone’s grief is unique. Consider saying, “I’m so sorry. I know this must be a terrible shock”. Avoid saying “I know how you feel”, because you don’t, and it is usually inappropriate to share details of your own losses. Try to be supportive, and allow the family to steer the discussion.
- Don’t feel that you have to make conversation; the family member may not wish to talk right now. The silence may be difficult for you, but try to stay on the scene until the police arrive; simply your presence may be of great comfort to the family. Offer to contact another relative, friend, or clergy member.
- Try to be professional, but avoid overly clinical explanations of the possible cause of death. If the family is not satisfied with “I’m sorry, but there’s no way to know for sure until the coroner finishes his examination,” it’s okay to say, “The most common cause of death is heart attack or stroke, but we can’t be absolutely sure that happened.” Be honest with the family, but unless it really appears otherwise, it’s fine to say, “It doesn’t look like he suffered,” and “This was a sudden tragic event and there is probably nothing anyone could have done about it.”
- Avoid euphemisms, such a “expired” or “passed away”. Using the words “dead” or “died” may seem harsh, but are the clearest way of delivering the news. But continue to refer to the patient as “him” or “her”, or by name; don’t say “the deceased”, “the body” or “the corpse”.
- Explain that the police will be coming and will ask a lot of questions, but will be able to give them some direction as well. Let them know that this is done routinely.
- If the family wishes to see or touch the body, (and assuming this is not a crime scene) allow it but consider preparing them for the fact that their relative may not look the same as before he or she died. Avoid covering the patient’s head with a sheet if at all possible.
- Realize that members of different cultural groups grieve and mourn in many different ways; what may seem strange to you might provide tremendous comfort to the family.
- Remember that the surviving relative is now your patient. By showing empathy and support, as well as being honest and professional in your interactions with theses survivors, you are providing the most meaningful and important form of patient care possible.

Excerpted and adapted from: Meoli, Mike. "Supporting the Bereaved: Field Notification of Death." Journal of Emergency Medical Services 18, no. 12 (1993):39–46.