

Guidance on Death Certificates & Coroner Process



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Death certificates

Issuing a death certificate is an essential aspect of the notification process to the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages in the state or territory in which the death took place. The information below is designed to assist medical practitioners to comply with their obligations under various Coroners legislation.

General steps

- Verifying life extinct
 - registered nurses, doctors, ambulance officers – so can other health professionals
- Issuing Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) or refer to Coroner.
- Registering the Death is required within 14 days.
 - The family will provide the person's details to the local registrar, with either the MCCD or the Coroners form giving the cause of death.
- Obtaining a burial or cremation order.
 - The registrar or coroner can issue a burial or cremation order. Cremation requires the completion of special forms by doctors in addition to the MCCD or coroners' forms.

Code of conduct

4.13 End of life care Doctors have a vital role in assisting the community to deal with the reality of death and its consequences. In caring for patients towards the end of their life, good medical practice involves:

- 4.13.1 Taking steps to manage a patient's symptoms and concerns in a manner consistent with their values and wishes.
- 4.13.2 Providing or arranging appropriate palliative care, including a multi-disciplinary approach whenever possible.
- 4.13.3 Understanding the limits of medicine in prolonging life and recognising when efforts to prolong life may not benefit the patient.
- 4.13.4 Understanding that you do not have a duty to try to prolong life at all cost. However, you have a duty to know when not to initiate and when to cease attempts at prolonging life, while ensuring that your patients receive appropriate relief from distress.
- 4.13.5 Accepting that patients have the right to refuse medical treatment or to request the withdrawal of treatment already started.
- 4.13.6 Respecting different cultural practices related to death and dying.
- 4.13.7 Striving to communicate effectively with patients and their families so they are able to understand the outcomes that can and cannot be achieved.
- 4.13.8 Encouraging advance care planning and facilitating the appropriate documentation, such as an advance care directive (or similar).
- 4.13.9 Taking reasonable steps to ensure that support is provided to patients and their families, even when it is not possible to deliver the outcome they seek.
- 4.13.10 Communicating bad news to patients and their families in the most appropriate way and providing support for them while they deal with this information.
- 4.13.11 When your patient dies, being willing to explain, to the best of your knowledge, the circumstances of the death to appropriate members of the patient's family and carers, unless you know the patient would have objected.
- 4.13.12 Sensitively discussing and encouraging organ and tissue donation with the patient's family, when appropriate and consistent with legislation and accepted protocols.

10.9 Medical reports, certificates and giving evidence

The community places a great deal of trust in doctors. Consequently, doctors have been given the authority to sign a variety of documents, such as a Medical certificate of cause of death (death certificates) and sickness certificates, on the assumption they will only sign statements that they know, or reasonably believe, to be true. Good medical practice involves:

- 10.9.1 Being honest and not misleading when writing reports and certificates, and only signing documents you believe to be accurate.
- 10.9.2 Taking reasonable steps to verify the content before you sign a report or certificate, and not omitting relevant information deliberately.
- 10.9.3 Preparing or signing documents and reports if you have agreed to do so, within a reasonable and justifiable time frame.
- 10.9.4 Making clear the limits of your knowledge and not giving opinion beyond those limits when providing evidence.

If you report a death to the Coroner do not issue a MCCD as well unless asked to by the Coroner

Complete a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) only if:

- you are 'comfortably satisfied' as to cause of death
- it's not a Reportable Death to the Coroner
- you are a registered medical practitioner
- time limits are complied with
- Where necessary obtain further information from your hospital, employer, state of Territory Health Department or contact MIPS

Do I need indemnity and registration to provide cremation services?

Yes. Similarly to issuing a death certificate or other tasks a practitioner may undertake after a person is deceased, authorising cremation requires practitioners to maintain their registration with AHPRA thus indemnity. MIPS can provide indemnity for members who are exclusively providing cremation services and members doing so, should complete a [Membership classification update](#) form to advise MIPS.

Resources

[Medical Board Good Medical Practice - a code of conduct for doctors in Australia](#)

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