POLICY

Pronouncement of Death

PREAMBLE

The issue of pronouncement of death continues to cause conflict and uncertainty for nurses and physicians throughout Saskatchewan. Institutions vary widely in policy as to who may pronounce death and the protocols to be followed subsequently. The Saskatchewan Medical Association, Saskatchewan Registered Nurses’ Association and the College of Physicians and Surgeons believe that standardization of these policies is highly desirable and would serve to minimize confusion and the potential for conflict.

The statutory requirements with respect to pronouncement and certification of death are as follows:

**Pronouncement:** There is no legal requirement that death be pronounced by a physician. This is a matter that can be regulated by policy of an institution.

**Certification:** There is a legal requirement that death must be certified by a physician or by a Coroner; this duty cannot be delegated. A physician or Coroner must sign the death certificate. There is no legal requirement that the physician must view the body before signing the death certificate. If the physician does not view the body, he/she must be satisfied as to a natural cause of death according to good medical practice and judgment.

**Moving a Body:** There is no legal requirement that a body must be seen by a physician before it may be moved, but if the death falls under *The Coroners Act*, the body may NOT be moved until the Coroner authorizes it.

In light of the above information, the Saskatchewan Medical Association, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan and the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses Association have developed a recommended policy for consideration by all acute and chronic care institutions as well as any other agencies under the jurisdiction of a district health board.
POLICY ON PRONOUNCEMENT OF DEATH

1. When death occurs and the death is expected, anticipated and due to natural causes a nurse* may pronounce death.

2. When a nurse pronounces death, the responsible physician shall be informed at once unless there is documentation on the record to the contrary.

3. When a nurse pronounces death under sections 1 and 2, the nurse may authorize removal of the body to a funeral home and if this is done, the physician shall be informed.

4. When death is unexpected, unexplained, appears to be from unnatural causes or otherwise falls under The Coroners Act:
   4.1 A nurse may pronounce death.
   4.2 The physician shall be informed at once and shall attend.
   4.3 The body shall not be moved nor interfered with in any way until the physician has viewed it.
   4.4 If the physician finds it necessary to inform a coroner, the body shall remain undisturbed until the coroner authorizes otherwise.

*For the purposes of this policy, a nurse is defined as a Registered Nurse or a Registered Psychiatric Nurse.