



**LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES
HARBOR-UCLA MEDICAL CENTER**

SUBJECT: DECEDENT VIEWING

POLICY NO. 140

CATEGORY: HIPAA-Privacy and Security	EFFECTIVE DATE: 5/18
POLICY CONTACT: Susan Stein, MD	UPDATE/REVISION DATE: 5/21
REVIEWED BY COMMITTEE(S):	

PURPOSE:

To provide guidelines and logistics which will allow family members and close friends to view decedents at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center while balancing the hospital's operational needs.

POLICY:

Harbor-UCLA Medical Center will offer decedent viewing to family members and close friends of the decedent whenever feasible, safe, and in compliance with law enforcement. **The Clinical Social Worker (CSW) has discretion as to which family members and close friends will be allowed to view at Harbor-UCLA. If viewing on the unit/patient care department is not feasible or sufficient time cannot be allowed for viewing of the deceased, the preferred alternative is that family and friends view the body at the mortuary or funeral home.** Children under 18 can view with consent of the parent or legal guardian(s). Deceased will be pre-viewed by adult guardian prior to viewing by the minor. Children must have 1:1 supervision by the child's responsible adult guardian. Viewing time is limited to 15 minutes. In extreme circumstances, HIPAA-compliant video viewing may be an alternative method of viewing.

PROCEDURE:

I. VIEWING OF DECEASED PATIENTS

A. When a Patient Dies in the Emergency Department (ED):

1. ED nursing will notify the Clinical Social Worker (CSW) as soon as feasible.
2. The CSW, in consultation with law enforcement, will determine whether the decedent is part of a criminal investigation that requires "no-touch" viewing behind a glass partition or whether direct viewing and touching can occur. This only applies to criminal investigations, for example a suspected homicide. The fact that a death is the result of trauma or is a coroner's case does not usually preclude direct viewing.
3. The CSW will be responsible for the decedent until the decedent arrives in the morgue. CSW will collaborate with ED nursing to determine where viewing of the decedent will be most appropriate. Most bodies will be moved to an ED viewing room, where the CSW can allow the decedent to remain for viewing.

REVISED: 5/21


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APPROVED BY: 

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4. Viewing requests should be met in the ED for up to six hours from time of death to allow for arrival of family members and close friends. This time frame may be extended at the discretion of the CSW and Nursing staff, as long as there is no negative impact on ED flow. It is recommended that the decedent be moved to the morgue as soon as the viewing requests of appropriate family members and close friends have been honored, which should be completed in the six-hour time frame. The CSW must be present for viewings and viewing time is limited to 15 minutes. If unable to arrive within the six-hour time frame, the family members and close friends will be advised of procedure for arranging viewing in the morgue.
5. Decedents should not be moved from the ED to the morgue at any time without CSW approval. The CSW is responsible for ensuring that all ED decedents are removed to the morgue.

B. When a Patient Dies in the Perioperative Areas (Operating Room, Cath Lab, Interventional Radiology, Endoscopy)

1. Area nursing will notify the CSW, as soon as feasible.
2. The CSW will escort the family members and close friends to the private family waiting room and will remain with the individuals while the surgeon/proceduralist performs the death notification.
3. The CSW, in consultation with law enforcement, will determine whether decedent is part of a criminal investigation that requires viewing behind a glass partition or whether direct viewing and touching can occur. Area staff can arrange for "no touch" viewings in a Post Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU) room. Viewing is limited to 15 minutes.
4. The CSW will be responsible for the disposition of the decedent, until the decedent arrives in the morgue. CSW will collaborate with area nursing to determine where viewing of the decedent will be most appropriate and who will accompany the family members and close friends during the viewing. Most decedents will be moved to a PACU room that will function as a viewing room for deaths in any of the Perioperative areas. The viewer may be asked to remain outside the glass partition for viewing. The CSW will be responsible for determining when the body can be removed to the morgue. The time allowed for family members and close friends to present to view the decedent will be at the discretion of area nursing and CSW, with the caveat that viewing requests should be honored in the PACU for up to a minimum of two hours, but never more than six hours. If the family members and close friends cannot arrive within the six-hour time frame, the CSW will arrange for viewing in the morgue.

C. When a Patient Dies in an Inpatient Unit:

1. The time allowed for family members and close friends to present to view the decedent in the nursing unit is up to a maximum of two hours, but in extreme circumstances may be longer based on discretion of nursing staff, and with the approval of the House Supervisor and the Administrator of the Day (AOD).
2. If the family members and close friends cannot arrive within the two-hour time frame, the House Supervisor will arrange for viewing in the morgue.
3. Viewing time is limited to 15 minutes.

D. Morgue Viewing:

1. Morgue hours are Monday-Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., except holidays, with the caveat that viewing may be deferred if there is an autopsy procedure in the morgue. Morgue attendants are on call to facilitate viewing during limited off hours, (e.g., Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays from 9:00 to noon).



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- Notes: The following conditions will preclude decedent viewing inside the morgue:
- When the decedent is being stored in an on-site refrigerated morgue trailer.
 - When the morgue is closed due to a building-management system failure, a hazardous materials or infection control event affecting the morgue.

The following conditions may preclude viewing inside the morgue:

- During a declared public health emergency
 - In the response and/or recovery phases of an internal disaster or a multi-fatality external disaster
2. The Laboratory Manager/designee (after hours, the Clinical Laboratory Scientist Supervisor or Lead Clinical Laboratory Scientist present on the shift) shall arrange for the morgue attendant to be present to prepare the decedent for – and be present for – the viewing.
 3. Exceptions to these viewing times must be approved by the House Supervisor and the AOD.
 4. Morgue visitation will be coordinated by the CSW and/or House Supervisor and will occur in the presence of the House Supervisor, and morgue attendant.
 5. The CSW, in consultation with law enforcement, will determine whether patient is involved in a criminal investigation and if direct viewing and/or touching can occur.

On those occasions when the decedent is transported from the place of death to a viewing area, the body will be transported in a body bag to avoid possibility of body fluid leak. Personnel transporting decedent's body must practice standard precaution with strict observation of hand hygiene. In all instances, if touching of the decedent has occurred by staff or family members, hand hygiene must be performed.

6. Special Instructions for CSW and House Supervisors regarding morgue viewings involving neonatal fatalities, stillborn or terminated fetuses in rare instances in which viewing cannot occur on ward or 7E L&D:
 - a. Standard Precaution - encourage mother to thoroughly perform hand hygiene if there has been physical contact.
 - b. Avoid touching body fluids.
 - c. If the body will be transported to the mother's room (private room preferred), may use body bag during transport if there is possibility of body fluid leak.