



# Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center

## DEPARTMENT OF NURSING

### CLINICAL

### POLICY AND PROCEDURE

**SUBJECT:** DEATH: POST-MORTEM CARE

**Policy No.:** C113.10

**Effective Date:** 03/1999

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**Purpose:** To prepare deceased patients for viewing; to ensure proper identification prior to transportation to the morgue; and to provide appropriate disposition of patient's belongings.

**Physician's Order Required:** No

**Performed By:** Registered Nurses, Licensed Vocational Nurses, Nurse Attendants, Nursing Students under the supervision of an RN

**Equipment Required:** Post-Mortem Kit

#### **Procedural Steps:**

1. Provide privacy - close room door and/or pull curtain around the bed.
2. Wear personal protective equipment (gloves, gown, mask, goggles/ face shield, as needed), and use universal precautions.
3. Position the body supine with a pillow under the head.
4. Keep hospital identification band on the patient. Remove all drainage tubing, IV lines, and other appliances except in a coroner's case.  
**Key Point:** In a coroner's case, all tubes and lines are to be clamped and left in the body as these might help to determine the cause of death.
5. Remove, clean, and replace prosthetic devices (e.g. artificial eye, dentures).
6. Prepare for viewing by washing body with soap and water. Place absorbent pads over any body orifice that leaks body fluids (e.g. rectum, urethra, or vagina). Cover the wounds with a dressing and use adhesive tape to hold it in place.
7. Close eyelids gently. If the eyes will not stay closed, moisten gauze pads and place them over the closed lids until they remain closed without assistance.
8. Close the mouth. Use a rolled towel under the chin to keep the mouth closed.
9. Remove all jewelry and give to the family. If there is no family available, send to cashier's office or Nursing Resource Office (after hours) per policy B516 Patient Valuables. If given to the family, be sure to document it in the electronic health record (EHR).  
**KEY POINT:** Patient's belongings - including cash, checks, or valuables, must be picked up from the cashier by the "person to notify" or next of kin.
10. Cover patient with a clean sheet.
11. Clean and prepare the room.

12. The patient may be kept on the unit for 1-2 hours after death, prior to hospital morgue pick up, to allow for viewing.  
**KEY POINT:** Only in extremely rare cases may the family view the body in the morgue at the discretion of the Nurse Manager or Administrative Nursing Supervisor.
13. Using the Post-Mortem Kit:
  - A. Prepare name tags in the pack by affixing labels with the patient's name and medical record number
  - B. Place patient on shroud sheet with absorbent pad over genital or perineal region.
  - C. Fasten chin strap, protecting face with an absorbent pad
  - D. Pad the wrists and ankles to prevent bruising, then tie wrists together over abdomen with cloth strip
  - E. Tie ankles together using another cloth strip and tie a name tag to patient's great toe.
  - F. Fold sheet around deceased; tie a cloth strip above elbows, at waist, and below knees. Fasten identification tag to the tie at waist.
  - G. Place wrapped body into the body bag and zip closed. Affix identification tag to zipper.
  - H. Notify hospital morgue (pathology lab) when body is ready to be picked up

**Documentation:**

1. Record the following on the EHR:
  - A. Completion of post mortem care
  - B. Disposition of valuables

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**Reviewed by:** Dulce Dones, MSN, RN

**References:**

Lippincott Procedures – Postmortem care. (2019, June 14). Retrieved from <https://procedures.lww.com/lnp/view.do?pId=2525379&hits=mortem,care,post&a=false>

Perry, A. G. & Potter, P. A. (2017). *Clinical Nursing Skills Technique* (9th Ed.). St. Louis: Mosby

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