

LOS ANGELES GENERAL MEDICAL CENTER POLICY

Subject: AUTOPSY (POST-MORTEM EXAMINATION)	Original Issue Date: 6/30/75	Policy # 201
	Supersedes: 2/13/18	Effective Date: 3/11/24
Policy Owner(s): Admin, Decedent Affairs Executive Sponsor(s): Chief Operations Officer		
Departments Consulted: Labs and Pathology Ethics Resource Committee (ERC) Fetal/Infant/Child Ethics Committee (FIC)	Reviewed & approved by: Attending Staff Association Executive Committee Senior Executive Officer	Approved by: Chief Operations Officer
		Chief Executive Officer

PURPOSE

To ensure that each autopsy performed respects the right of the decedent and their family to privacy and self-determination in accordance with State laws.

POLICY

Deaths that fall within the jurisdiction of the Medical Examiner’s Office must be referred to the Department of Medical Examiner for proper disposition. For all other decedents, an autopsy should be requested after every hospital death and consent must be obtained from the survivor’s spouse or next of kin, who, by law, controls the disposition of the remains. Proper consent or authorization must be obtained and witnessed by hospital personnel prior to beginning any autopsy; this documentation must be filed as part of the decedent’s hospital record.

Post-mortem examination shall be performed on the remains of the decedent by a pathologist when written authorization has been obtained from the authorized next of kin, based on the authority level determined by the California Health and Safety Code 7100 including the following:

- The patient, prior to death (by will, written instructions, or advance directive)
- The surviving spouse or registered domestic partner
- A surviving child (adult)
- A surviving parent
- A surviving brother or sister
- By an individual who has been appointed as attorney-in-fact in the decedent’s Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care and authorized to consent to post-mortem examination
- Any other kin or person who has acquired the right to control the disposition of the remains
- A Public Administrator
- A coroner or any other duly authorized public officer such as the State Curator of the Unclaimed Dead.

DEFINITIONS

Autopsy An examination of a body after death to determine the cause of death or character and extent of changes produced by disease. In some cases, autopsies are required

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by law. In other cases, autopsies may be especially helpful, though not limited to, in the following situations:

1. In evaluation of a death due to unknown and/or unanticipated medical complications.
2. Further the understanding of disease processes in a patient in which the cause of death is not known with certainty on clinical grounds, such as in cases of newly emerging infections or in cancer patients in whom there is no prior tissue diagnosis or origin is unclear.
3. To help allay concerns and provide reassurance to the family and/or the public regarding a death
4. For patients who have participated in clinical trials (protocols) approved by institutional review boards.
5. Obstetric (both maternal and fetal) and pediatric deaths that are otherwise not under the jurisdiction of the Medical Examiner.
6. Deaths at any age in which it is felt that autopsy would disclose a known or suspected illness that may also have a bearing on survivors or recipients of transplant organs.
7. Deaths known or suspected to have resulted from occupational or environmental hazards that are not otherwise under the jurisdiction of the Medical Examiner.
8. Sudden, unexpected, or unexplained death in the hospital that is apparently natural and not otherwise under the jurisdiction of the Medical Examiner.

PROCEDURE

Follow steps shown on the LA General Medical Center intranet at:

[Autopsy Services.pdf](#)

Please note that the Autopsy Services Policy found at this link list the kinds of cases to be reported to the Medical Examiner. Cases not requiring reporting, or those that have been cleared or released by the Medical Examiner may be performed with Informed Consent provided by the NOK.

The post-mortem request/consent shall be classified as an Informed Consent. In accordance with Medical Center policy, a licensed independent practitioner shall inform the NOK of the following when obtaining the written authorization:

- The post-mortem examination is similar to a surgical procedure.
- Tissues, including eyes, may be retained for diagnostic and educational purposes.
- Tissues retention for research, therapeutic, and/or transplantation purposes, would require a separate informed consent.
- The procedure and examination shall provide a method of further clarifying the cause of death.
- The procedure and examination do not obstruct the ability for tissue or organ donation, nor the ability of the family to proceed with desired funeral arrangements.
- While a full autopsy examination will provide the greatest amount of information, a limited autopsy can be performed according to NOK wishes.

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- Consultation with Pathology Autopsy Department can provide assistance when needed in how to best optimize the examination within the constraints of the NOK concerns.

Neither the refusal by survivors to authorize a post-mortem examination, nor the unavailability of an autopsy assistant (Diener) to prepare the body for the autopsy procedure, shall result in delaying the release of the deceased patient to an appropriate mortuary, should that be the expressed wish of the decedent's family.

RESPONSIBILITY

Physician caring for the decedent is responsible to obtain the Informed Consent for the post-mortem examination.

PROCEDURE DOCUMENTATION

The results of autopsies performed at LA General Medical Center will appear in ORCHID and can be accessioned from Pathology.

REFERENCES

California Health and Safety Code, Sections 7053, 7100, 7113
DHS Policy #316.1, Authority For Autopsy
Joint Commission Standards (Ethics, Rights, and Responsibilities)

<https://www.ascp.org/content/docs/default-source/policy-statements/ascp-pdf-pp-autopsy.pdf?sfvrsn=4>
[E.GuidelinesNonforensicAutopsies.pdf \(cap.org\)](#)

ATTACHMENTS

Request for Autopsy can be found at the following link from the LA General intranet:
[Post Mortem Requisition.pdf](#)

REVISION DATES

August 1, 1995; February 16, 1999; April 16, 2002; January 27, 2004, September 23, 2008;
January 13, 2015, December 12, 2017, February 13, 2018; March 11, 2024