

DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES ADMINISTRATION
Olympia, Washington

TITLE:	CLIENT AUTOPSY	9.10
--------	----------------	------

Authority: [RCW 68.50.010](#) *Human Remains*
[Title 71A RCW](#) *Developmental Disabilities*

PURPOSE

This policy establishes a process for obtaining a postmortem examination or autopsy.

For additional guidance and requirements regarding the death of a client, refer to [DSHS Administrative Policy 9.03](#), *Administrative Review—Death of a Residential Client*.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all client deaths which occur at any DDA state-operated facility or State-Operated Community Residential (SOCR) programs, including clients who have temporarily transferred to a hospital or nursing facility.

POLICY

- A. If a client or youth dies while in the care of a DDA facility, an autopsy may be medically valuable to obtain a postmortem examination, required by law, or both.
- B. An autopsy may be mandated by a coroner under [RCW 68.50.010](#).
- C. An autopsy is elective if the coroner declines jurisdiction and:
 - 1. The attending medical provider believes valuable information pertaining to medical care may be obtained; or
 - 2. The medical provider desires additional clarification of the circumstances of the death after discussing the case with:
 - a. The RHC Superintendent.

- b. Youth Transitional Care Facility Executive Officer;
- c. The SOCR Director; or
- d. The client's family or legal representative.

PROCEDURES

- A. Following verification of a death, the medical care provider must determine if an autopsy is mandatory or elective.
 - 1. If an autopsy appears mandatory:
 - a. The medical provider must obtain confirmation from the county medical examiner or coroner that they have assumed jurisdiction.
 - b. The medical provider or designee must inform the deceased's family or legal representative that the medical examiner or coroner may perform an autopsy.
 - c. The medical provider may help the medical examiner or coroner obtain consent for the autopsy.
 - 2. If an autopsy is elective:
 - a. The medical provider must notify the RHC Superintendent, SOCR Director, or Youth Transitional Care Facility Executive Officer that they believe an autopsy is desirable; and
 - b. The medical care provider must request permission for an autopsy when they notify the deceased's family or legal representative.
- B. Consent for Elective Autopsy
 - 1. The medical provider must obtain consent from the deceased's family or legal representative for an elective autopsy.
 - 2. The medical care provider must obtain consent from the deceased's family or legal representative in person or by telephone.
 - a. If the medical care provider obtains consent by telephone, the physician must obtain consent with a witness present via a monitored phone call.

- b. If the physician obtains consent in person, the consent must be recorded in writing.

C. Arrangements for Autopsy

If an autopsy will be performed, the medical provider, or nursing supervisor in coordination with the medical provider, must make all necessary arrangements, including contact with the county medical examiner or coroner (or, if the medical examiner or coroner declines to perform the autopsy, the contracted autopsy provider) and perform other actions as specified in Procedure Sections (A) and (B) above. Coordination with any tissue donation may also be required in accordance with the deceased's family or legal representative.

D. Autopsy Expense

- 1. If the autopsy is mandatory, the county medical examiner or coroner's policy prevails regarding payment.
- 2. If the autopsy is elective, all costs shall be assumed by DDA if not covered by the county medical examiner or coroner.

E. Documentation

The autopsy report is confidential and must be filed in the deceased's official medical record. Copies are usually not authorized due to confidentiality, therefore DDA staff must record any findings from the autopsy report into the client's Incident Report Investigation.

EXCEPTIONS

Any exception to this policy must have the prior written approval of the Deputy Assistant Secretary.

SUPERSESSION

DDA Policy 9.10, *Client Autopsy*
Issued November 1, 2017

Approved: _____



Deputy Assistant Secretary
Developmental Disabilities Administration

Date: July 1, 2024