



Instructions for Funeral Directors: Compliance with the Death with Dignity Act

Washington's Death with Dignity Act (RCW 70.245) states that "...the patient's death certificate...shall list the underlying terminal disease as the cause of death." The act also states that, "Actions taken in accordance with this chapter do not, for any purpose, constitute suicide, assisted suicide, mercy killing, or homicide, under the law."

To ensure compliance with the strict requirements of the Death with Dignity Act:

1. Carefully review the cause-of-death section of **every** death record. Watch for any language that may indicate that the decedent used the Death with Dignity Act.
2. The following terms should not be included in the death record:
 - a. Assisted suicide
 - b. Physician-assisted suicide
 - c. Death with Dignity
 - d. I-1000
 - e. Mercy killing
 - f. Euthanasia
3. If the cause-of-death section contains any of the terms above (or any other language that may indicate use of the Death with Dignity Act), **DO NOT SIGN** (or electronically approve) the certificate. *Call the State Registrar at the Center for Health Statistics (360-236-4307) immediately for guidance on how to proceed.*
4. The terms Secobarbital, Seconal, Pentobarbital, and Nembutal may indicate use of the Death with Dignity Act. If the cause-of-death section lists any of these terms, *call the State Registrar at the Center for Health Statistics (360-236-4307) immediately for guidance on how to proceed.*

If the State Registrar concludes that the death record contains any language that violates the Death with Dignity Act, you will be required, under RCW 70.58.030, to obtain a correction from the medical certifier before a burial-transit permit will be issued by the Local Registrar.¹

¹ Under state law, the State Registrar of Vital Statistics "shall prepare and issue such detailed instruction as may be required to secure the uniform observance of its provisions and the maintenance of a perfect system of registration. ... The State Registrar shall carefully examine the certificates received monthly from the local registrars, county auditors, and clerks of the court and, if any are incomplete or unsatisfactory, the State Registrar shall require such further information to be furnished as may be necessary to make the record complete and satisfactory." RCW 43.70.160.