



Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission

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Virginia Hilton, RH, Director of Nursing
Tacoma Lutheran Home & Retirement Community
1301 N Highland Parkway
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Dear Ms. Hilton:

At their January 31, 1997 meeting, the Washington State Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission (Nursing Commission), considered your request for an advisory opinion. In response to the question posed, "Can a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) pronounce death? Under what circumstances?"

Yes, the Licensed Practical Nurse may pronounce death under the delegating authority of the Registered Nurse (RN). The requirements as outlined in WAC 246-839-830 would apply:

Determination and Pronouncement of Death

A nurse may determine and pronounce death, but shall not certify death as defined in [RCW 70.58.160](#) unless the nurse is an Advanced Registered Nurse Practitioner (ARNP) or certified nurse midwife as defined in [WAC 246-840-830](#).

- (1) A nurse midwife may assume responsibility for the determination and pronouncement of death only if there are written policies and procedures relating to the determination and pronouncement of death in the organization with which the nurse is associated as an employee or by contract, provided the nurse's practice of the responsibility.
 - (a) The decedent was under the care of a health care practitioner qualified to certify cause of death; and
 - (b) The decedent was a patient of the organization with which the nurse is associated; and
 - (c) There is a "do not resuscitate order" in the patient's record when the decedent was assisted by mechanical life support systems at the time of determination and pronouncement of death.
- (2) A nurse who assumes responsibility of the determination and pronouncement of death shall be knowledgeable of the laws and regulations regarding death and human remains.

- (3) A nurse who assumes responsibility for the determination and pronouncement of death shall:
 - (a) Perform a physical assessment of the patient's condition;
 - (b) Insure that family and physician and other care givers are notified of the death;
and
 - (c) Document the findings of the assessment and notification in all appropriate records.

Under Registered Nurse delegation the Licensed Practical Nurse remains responsible for assuring their own competency in the skills to determine death. The facility should include in the LPN personnel file, documentation of the LPN skills assessment or credentialing used for competency assurance. With this documentation, the Registered Nurse can use his/her delegating authority to permit the Licensed Practical Nurse to pronounce death when the Registered Nurse is unavailable.

Any opinion issued by the Commission is advisory and intended for the guidance of the requesting parties only. The opinion is not legally binding and does not have the force and effect of a duly promulgated regulation or declaratory ruling by the Commission.

Sincerely,

Victoria Fletcher, RN, MSN, ARNP
Commission Chairperson

Adopted: January 31, 1997