

Instructions for Medical Examiners and Coroners

Death Certificate Compliance with the Death with Dignity Act

Washington State'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."

The Washington State Registrar of Vital Statistics will reject any death report that violates the requirements of the Death with Dignity Act. A Local Registrar or Funeral Director will require you to correct language in the death report that might indicate use of the Death with Dignity Act before they approve the report and issue a burial-transit permit. If you have any questions about compliance or cause of death reporting, contact the Department of Health at DeathwithDignity@doh.wa.gov.

Process Recommendations

If you know the decedent used the Death with Dignity Act, you must follow the law when completing the death report. We recommend that you:

1. List the underlying terminal disease as the cause of death.
2. Mark the manner of death as "Natural."
3. Avoid using language in the cause of death section that might indicate the decedent used the Death with Dignity Act, such as:
 - a. Suicide
 - b. Assisted suicide
 - c. Physician-assisted suicide
 - d. Death with Dignity
 - e. I-1000
 - f. Mercy killing
 - g. Euthanasia
 - h. Secobarbital or Seconal
 - i. Pentobarbital or Nembutal