

PRONOUNCEMENT OF DEATH

Palliative Care & End of Life Services
Clinical Practice Bulletin



CAN NURSES PRONOUNCE DEATH IN BC? WHAT IS THE PROCEDURE?

RN, RPN, LPN

There is no legal requirement to pronounce death in BC, but it is regarded as sound and ethical practice, and a courtesy and support for attending family to verify a natural and expected death. Pronouncement of death is within regulated nursing scope of practice for RNs, NPs, RPNs, and LPNs.

Note: RN, RPN, LPN do not pronounce medically assisted deaths.

Pronouncement of Death Assessment

1. **Check** for absence of the following:

- any response to verbal and tactile stimuli
- pulse for one minute
- respirations for at least 2 minutes to determine absence of breathing
- heart sounds for at least 2 minutes to determine cessation of cardiac activity
- pupil reaction to light (fixed and dilated position).

2. **Verify** the person's identity:

- if the person's identity is unknown at the time of death, contact PCC/Manager/Supervisor or designate.

3. **Pronounce** person's death and declare time of death

4. **Document** findings and time of death in the person's health record.

PRACTICE TIPS

PRONOUNCING VS CERTIFYING DEATH:



- **Pronouncing** a death is to issue an opinion that life has ceased, based on a physical assessment of the person. Nurses are able to pronounce death as there is no legal requirement that it must be done by a physician.
- **Certifying** a death is the legal written process of attesting to the fact, cause, and manner of a person's death on a required form. The province of BC has legislated that doctors and nurse practitioners must certify a death within 48 hours.

WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

- Pronouncement of death by a healthcare professional is required before a funeral home will transport the body, in absence of a "Notification of Expected Death in the Home" (EDITH form).

RESOURCES (insideNet)

Review **Care of the Deceased Practice Standard** for program-specific information:

Acute Care

Long-term Care