**Autopsy/Medical Examiner (ME) Case**

Creutzfeldt-Jacob Disease (CJD) is a fatal disease characterized by ataxia, rapidly progressive dementia, and spongiform neuropathologic changes. Possible infective elements are blood, brain, cerebrospinal fluid, kidney, liver, lung, lymph node, and urine. If CJD is a suspected diagnosis, then autopsy/removal of the brain will not be performed at our institution. The following diseases should be communicated to autopsy/mortician: known or suspected CJD, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), smallpox, or monkeypox.

Whenever a patient dies at St. Mary’s Medical Center (SMMC), it should be determined with the Nurse Manager or Administrative Representative if decedent should be referred to the ME. Confer with staff pathologists as necessary at 218-786-4019, or page through Med Direct if after hours. If the decision is made to refer case to ME, call the SMMC operator and request the ME. The ME will call the facility and determine if decedent is a ME case. The ME makes the final decision.

**Criteria for a ME Case**

1. All traumatic deaths – regardless of length of time that has passed.
   - A. Murder
   - B. Suicide
   - C. All accidents (eg, automobile, explosion, fires, drowning, railroad)
   - D. Falls resulting in fractures and subsequent death from complication
   - E. Fatal poisonings and overdoses
   - F. Abuse of children and vulnerable adults
2. All deaths in the Emergency Room (ER)
3. All cases that arrive in ER dead on arrival
4. Any cases where the manner of death is unknown
   - A. Unexpected death
   - B. Deaths related to use of restraint or psychotropic drugs
5. Patients <50 years of age who are not under medical care
6. Deaths of prison inmates and other public institutions

An “Autopsy Consent Form” is not required for a ME case.

The physician is responsible to discuss with the family the benefits of an autopsy. Consent for autopsy must be obtained from legal next of kin in the following order (line of kinship must be followed). Spouse, adult child, either parent, adult brother or sister, guardian, or the deceased at time of death, person authorized or under obligation to dispose of body. If appropriate family member has been declared incompetent by the courts, the decision then transfers to the next member in the line of kinship. Telephone permission for autopsy is valid when appropriate legal next of kin is identified and the call is monitored by 2 persons and documented on the “Autopsy Consent Form.”

Family may request an autopsy at no charge. If an autopsy is requested, fill out an “Autopsy Consent Form.” Check complete or limited per physician discussion. Assure correct signature is on the consent form. Either the nurse or physician obtains the signature from the legal next of kin. Even if a physician wants an autopsy, the legal next of kin must agree and sign the “Autopsy Consent Form.” It is the responsibility of nursing to notify the pathologist and the Administrative Representative of the need for an autopsy. Call the Pathology Department at 218-786-4019 and speak to department or leave a message. On weekends and holidays, the Administrative Representative will access the pathologist on-call by pager.

If an autopsy or ME case, leave all lines in place. Attached equipment to lines (eg, intravenous bags) must go to the morgue. If a ME case, all belongings stay with the body. If eyes are to be donated or pending eye donation, elevate head, close eyelids, secure with paper tape, and place ice pack on eyes. Place an identification tag on the big toe. A yellow morgue record must always accompany the body to the morgue. Keep white copy on the chart.

The decedent’s chart should go with the body to the morgue when there is an autopsy, potential autopsy, organ, tissue, or eye donation. The signed “Autopsy Consent Form” should be on top of the chart. For a ME case, the Hospital Unit Coordinator copies the chart or information requested by the ME. The copied part of the chart goes with the body to the morgue. The original chart is left on the nursing unit for HIS to pick up. It is delivered to the laboratory and placed in the send out basket by Transport, room 3177.