

Transcript - Demonstration of the Confirmation of Death Procedure

This video has been designed as a learning resource to support the preparation of registered health care practitioners undertaking the Confirmation of Death Procedure in Scotland.

The video will demonstrate the essential clinical examination required to confirm death aligned to the nationally agreed standard as well as an outline of your responsibilities as a practitioner once the procedure is completed in relation to documentation and referral.

The procedure being demonstrated is based on best current evidence available and agreed by a national expert working group. The request for you to attend to confirm a reported death is not anticipated to involve an urgent or emergency response. However, you should use your clinical judgment based on information received and the circumstance you are presented with.

Prior to attending please make sure you have the equipment and required paperwork with you.

When you arrive at the person's home or care facility, as in all other visits, explain who you are, show your identity badge, say why you are there and gain consent to enter the home. Sensitively express your condolences to the family member or carers present.

If this is the first time you have met the family member or carer, confirm their relationship with the deceased. Then establish what the person's understanding is of what has happened. Explain that the purpose of your visit is to confirm the death so that respectful removal of the deceased person can be arranged and funeral arrangements initiated.

Confirm that the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death, often known as the Death Certificate, will be completed by an appropriate medical practitioner, usually the deceased person's doctor. Explain that you are required to examine the deceased person. And also explain the information requirements, why they are needed and seek consent to share with relevant authorities.

Confirm with the relative or carer to the best of their knowledge, the personal details you already hold about the deceased person including the name of their doctor or GP practice where possible.

It is important to record the time of death to the best knowledge of any witnesses present and to record witness details as in the confirmation of death recording document. This information may assist the doctor completing the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death. It is also important to check if any religious or spiritual practices or observances need to be taken into account in undertaking the confirmation of death procedure.

Ask to be taken to examine the deceased to confirm the death.

Observe the general situation and surrounding environment.

Ask for the opportunity for hand washing or to use hand gel.

Please ask if the relative or carer would like to be present during the confirmation of death examination.

Prepare the equipment you need to undertake the procedure. Clean your hands using facilities or hand gel and then put on gloves and apron.

Look around the area for any hazards.

Approach the deceased with dignity and respect and taking any religious or spiritual observances into account.

Undertake an initial check of the whole body of the deceased whilst protecting their dignity.

Lift the covers to view the whole body for any obvious conditions, or presence of sharps, body fluids, medical devices or equipment.

You should then commence the procedure to check the clinical signs to confirm death.

This examination should be conducted over a minimum period of five minutes.

Begin by exposing the chest area to look for evidence of implantable devices.

Proceed to palpate the carotid pulse for a minimum of one minute.

It is important to check on both sides.

Using the stethoscope, listen to the heart at the apex for a minimum of one minute.

Then look, listen and feel for respiratory effort.

Using the stethoscope listen for breath sounds in the upper and lower zones on both sides of the chest for a minimum of one minute.

Ensure you listen over all areas comparing right and left.

Then undertake the trapezius squeeze test.

Finally use a pen torch to test for fixed, dilated pupils. Examine both pupils.

Once you have completed the procedure please ensure that you leave the deceased appropriately covered.

Clean your stethoscope and safely dispose of clinical waste.

Use hand hygiene measures as appropriate.

Record your clinical examination findings on the Confirmation of Death recording document noting the time you completed all the checks.

Record any additional observations regarding medical devices or known hazards.

If you identify any concerns over the circumstances of the death that may require referral to the police or procurator fiscal, you should note this in the section of the form for the attention of the responsible medical practitioner.

Once the documentation has been completed it is essential to meet with the relative or carer and sensitively inform them that you have confirmed the death.

Explain what they need to do next. This includes contacting the funeral director to arrange for respectful removal of the deceased person's body.

It is also essential to share with the relative or carer what will happen to the completed confirmation of death form and to provide relevant information on both arranging a funeral and for bereavement support. Provide them with the relevant local and national booklets

Please note once you have completed the procedure and left the house or care facility, you have responsibility to communicate that you have confirmed the death and to communicate the information on the recording template to the GP or the appropriate medical practitioner responsible for issuing the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death. This process will be guided by your local employer and health board policy and procedure.

We would like to acknowledge the help in developing this resource from the NHS board leads, the national expert working group, Clinical Skills Managed Education Network, NHS Education Scotland, NHS Lothian medical photography department and the practitioners who volunteered their expertise and time in the development of this learning resource.

The film was produced in March 2020 and can be found at www.sad.scot.nhs.uk or <https://vimeo.com/402200321>

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