

**HACKETTSTOWN REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER
ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY MANUAL**

AUTOPSIES

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Effective Date: July 1996

Policy No: PC 04

Cross Referenced:

Origin: PC

Reviewed Date: December 2008

Authority: CNE

Revised Date: December 2008

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SCOPE

All nursing units.

PURPOSE

To establish the procedure for autopsy and to define the authority for requesting and obtaining consent for autopsy at Hackettstown Regional Medical Center (HRMC).

POLICY

The hospital will coordinate autopsies through the Department of Pathology when, in the attending physician's or pathologist's professional opinion, an autopsy would provide useful information regarding the medical care or diagnosis provided to the deceased.

Autopsies may need to be considered in the following instances:

1. Deaths in which an autopsy may help explain unknown and unanticipated medical complications.
2. Deaths in which the cause is not known with certainty on clinical grounds.
3. Cases in which an autopsy may help allay concerns of the family and/or the public regarding the death, and provide reassurance to them regarding the same.
4. All obstetric deaths.
5. All neonatal and pediatric deaths.
6. Deaths at any age in which it is felt the autopsy would disclose a known or suspected illness which may also have a bearing on survivors or recipients of transplant organs.

CONSENT:

It is the responsibility of the attending physician to request permission for the autopsy; however, he/she may request the nurse to ask permission from the relatives.

The consent for autopsy is given by the next of kin.

1. The nearest responsible relative for an adult is either a spouse, an adult child, or a parent.
2. If the deceased has no spouse, it is necessary to make an attempt to obtain the consent of an adult child of the deceased.
3. An executor of an estate may sign if he can produce proof of executorship. An individual who has power of attorney for health care may sign for an autopsy.

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4. The CEO of a hospital in the State of New Jersey can sign for autopsy as per New Jersey State law.
5. When obtaining consent for autopsy in the death of a fetus or neonate, consent of either parent is required. If one parent objects, a court order needs to be obtained.
6. A telephone or telegram consent **is not** accepted. If there is some emergency reason to have an autopsy done without written consent, it can be handled on a case by case basis through administration and the hospital attorney.
7. No consent is required for Medical Examiner cases. Refer to AD 68 for criteria.

PROCEDURE

1. Supportive Data:
 - a. Signed Consent.
2. Content:
 - a. The deceased patient's medical record is placed in a manila envelope, sealed and labeled with the patient's name. (In cases of fetal demise or stillbirth, there may be no chart.)
 - b. The sealed chart, the death certificate and the autopsy permit are then hand-carried by any nursing personnel to the Pathology Department. The manager of the department will alert the Pathologist first. Autopsy arrangements will be * made with St. Clare's Hospital by the Pathologist on site and the body will be transported to that facility.

*Arrangements for transport of the deceased to St. Clare's Hospital will be made by Nursing Administration. Call Cochran's Funeral Home or Scala Funeral Home to request transport of the deceased.
3. When the pathologist has reviewed the record, a phone call is to be made to notify the attending physician of the time of the autopsy so that he or she may attend if desired. An opportunity is also provided at this time for the attending physician to relay pertinent aspects of the clinical history and questions that he or she hopes the autopsy will answer.
4. When the autopsy is completed, the pathologist will notify the attending physician with the provisional results. Preliminary reports are sent to the attending physician and the medical record within twenty-four (24) hours.
5. A final autopsy report will be given to the attending physician and placed in the medical record within thirty (30) days for uncomplicated autopsies. Complicated cases may require 60 – 90 days to complete.