

Commonly Needed Documents

- A certified death certificate will be needed for most aspects of setting the decedent's affairs. These certified death certificates can be ordered through the funeral home or ordered directly from the state.
- Human Gift registry paperwork
- Funeral pre-planning paperwork
- Will

Pathology, Anatomy, & Laboratory Medicine (PALM)
Autopsy Service
WVU Health Sciences Center
P.O. Box 9203 Room 2133
Morgantown, WV 26506

Phone: 304-285-7095

End of Life



When Death Occurs

No matter if a death is sudden, or if it is something that was a long time coming, the loss of a loved one makes us feel emotional and overwhelmed. No amount of preparation can fully prepare you for the loss of a loved one. When you are in a heightened emotional state, even the most basic decisions can seem staggering. The following is some information that may assist you after death.

Center for Organ Recovery and Education (CORE)

You may be approached by a Center for Organ Recovery and Education (CORE) representative. The Center for Organ Recovery and Education (CORE) is an organization dedicated to promoting donation, education, and research for the purpose of saving and improving lives through organ, tissue and cornea transplantation.

Autopsy

Ordered by family

An autopsy can help families, doctors, and communities understand death a little better. A complete autopsy is an examination of the body after death using surgical techniques. The examination is performed by a pathologist, a specially trained medical doctor of disease and/or injury on the body.

Families may request an autopsy to be done by the hospital and will be required to fill out an autopsy consent.

Medicolegal Autopsy (State Ordered)

Medicolegal autopsy is performed with the aim of providing answers to questions about the identity, cause of death, circumstances of death, etc, thus helping the law enforcing agencies to solve the crime.

****Note: If families consent for CORE recovery, an autopsy can still be performed.***

WVU Human Gift Registry

To donate one's body to the health sciences is a noble, compassionate and humanitarian gesture. The benefits to mankind are beyond measure. After death, the body can become a source of life to others. That life is given through formal medical training in human anatomy, which is the foundation of a health care professional's skill and knowledge. Serious and dedicated study of the human body is absolutely essential in order to develop the specialized competency medical professionals must have to provide quality health care for all. The process of donating to the Human Gift Registry is very simple and straightforward. Prior to death, an individual may register to donate his or her own body. <https://medicine.hsc.wvu.edu/anatomy/human-gift-registry/donate/>

Burial Arrangements

Once death occurs, contact the director of the funeral home of your choice. The funeral director can help you with arrangements for your loved one. If there is any funeral pre-planning paperwork, it is important to have this available when contacting the funeral home.

Common Concerns about Autopsies

Is there a charge for autopsy?

The autopsy provides a greater understanding of the quality of patient care. It is also one of the most expensive procedures performed in many hospitals. At WVU Medicine this service is provided at no cost to WVU Medicine patients. For non-WVU patients, contact the WVU Autopsy Service, phone 304-285-7095.

Will the autopsy affect funeral arrangements?

The performance of an autopsy should not delay a funeral or affect viewing of the body.

Does the pathologist retain any organs?

The pathologist may retain some organs for more detailed examination, research, or educational purposes. Retained organs are disposed of in accordance with hospital policy. Families may require that organs be released to the funeral home with the body by giving specific instructions on the written autopsy consent form. However, doing so may affect the results of the autopsy.

Are there religious conflicts?

People may worry that performance of an autopsy may conflict with religious beliefs. Religious decisions are always personal. Families may want to discuss the decision to have an autopsy performed with other family members and religious or spiritual advisors.

When will I get autopsy results?

Hospital autopsies are completed within 2-3 months. Sometimes longer depending on complexity.

Medicolegal autopsy reports typically takes at least six to eight weeks for the autopsy report to be completed. The OCME does not release a report until all information has been gathered from third parties, testing has been performed and the final evaluation written.

Questions?

Questions about the autopsy please call 304-285-7095 and speak to the autopsy staff.

Additional questions about the autopsy report can be directed to your physician or nurse. They can arrange for you to speak with the appropriate contact person in WVU Medicine Department of Pathology, Anatomy, and Laboratory Medicine Autopsy Service.

2001-2008 College of American Pathologists (CAP)



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*Autopsy:
Understanding Death
Helps the Living*



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Laboratory Medicine*

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Aiding the Living by Understanding Death

When a loved one dies, family is grieving and may have many questions. One way of helping the family understand what has happened to their loved one is by performing an autopsy. An autopsy has additional values including increasing medical knowledge for clinicians and researchers, which benefits patients and families.

What is an autopsy?

A complete autopsy is an examination of the body after death using surgical techniques. The examination is performed by a pathologist, a specially trained medical doctor of disease and /or injury. The procedure takes about two to four hours to perform. This examination may be comprehensive or may be limited to a particular organ system.

The autopsy room is regarded as a special place for gathering medical knowledge. The body is treated with dignity and respect, and the wishes of the family are maintained at all times. Small samples of each organ are taken for microscopic examination to look for disease such as cancer or infection. Other tests may be performed. When the examination is completed, a written report is issued, which takes several weeks to prepare depending on the tests that may be performed. The report becomes a permanent part of the patient's medical record and is available to the family from medical records. The family may discuss the findings with the patient's physician or with the pathologist.

Why perform an autopsy?

The primary purpose of an autopsy is to answer any questions the family or physician may have about any illnesses, cause of death, and/or any co-existing conditions. Establishing or understanding the cause of death can be a source of comfort to families. The autopsy may also determine whether there are inheritable problems and help other family members through early diagnosis and treatment. Furthermore, what is learned through an autopsy on one patient may help save the lives of others with similar conditions.

Who requests an autopsy?

In certain circumstances, the law mandates that an autopsy be performed. In all other cases, permission from the next of kin or designated responsible party is required. In some cases, the patient may have indicated their wish for an autopsy in discussions with the family or by signing a personal directive for autopsy. The autopsy cannot be performed without consent of the legally designated responsible party, usually the next of kin. When giving consent, the family may make any restrictions, limitations, or special requests.

How families benefit from the autopsy

- Discovering diseases that may run in the family can help through early diagnosis and treatment, and in family planning.
- Discovering an infection, for example tuberculosis, may lead to early diagnosis and treatment to help other family members and close contacts.
- Uncovering evidence of a work-related disease might lead to compensation for the family.
- Providing crucial information for the settling of insurance claims or death benefits may result in benefits for the family.

- Confirming a specific cause of death may simply ease the stress of the unknown.
- Confirming that the diagnosis and treatment were appropriate may be comforting to the family.
- Knowledge that information gained by the autopsy may help someone else live longer may ease the profound sense of loss experienced by families.

How communities benefit from autopsies

- Increasing knowledge about causes and course of an illness and effects of different types of treatment.
- Disclosing evidence of environmental hazards.
- Explaining the causes of injuries and accidents involving automobiles, falls, or other situations.
- Helping to establish the cause and manner of death, which at times may be required by law.
- Contributing to research which can benefit other patients.