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OTHER RESOURCES

GIFT OF LIFE
Organ Procurement Agency of Michigan
(800) 482-4881

SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE
(231) 724-6063

(0648-02) Rev. 07/09

AUTOPSIES

Common Questions & Answers



Muskegon County
Office of the Medical Examiner
Sparrow Health System
1215 E Michigan Ave
Lansing, MI 48912

Tel: (517) 364-2561
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www.muskegonhealth.net

COMMON QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ABOUT AUTOPSIES

WHAT IS AN AUTOPSY?

A complete forensic autopsy is a comprehensive external and internal examination of the body after death and is performed in Lansing. Muskegon County residents are fortunate to have forensic pathologists as medical examiners who have completed advanced training death investigation.

The forensic pathologist/medical examiner will order any test, additional studies, and/or consultation with specialists anywhere in the world if necessary to assist in the determination of cause and manner of death.

REASONS AN AUTOPSY IS IMPORTANT

An autopsy is ordered by the medical examiner to determine or confirm the cause and manner of death. However, there are other reasons an autopsy is important, such as:

- Many physicians will request copies of the autopsy report as there has been increasing awareness that identifying inherited or familial diseases may lead to early diagnosis and treatment of other family members.
- The autopsy provides crucial evidence to law enforcement officials, insurance companies, and others. This information is important for insurance claims, work-related compensation or other death benefits.
- Finding a specific cause of death may ease the stress of the unknown.
- Other tests, such as toxicology for drugs and alcohol are done.
- Finding that the diagnosis and treatment was appropriate may be of comfort to family members.

RETENTION OF ORGANS/PARTS

In some cases, it is necessary for the medical examiner to retain one or more organs or human parts so that special tests or examinations may be conducted to determine or document the cause, manner, and circumstances of death.

RETENTION OF ORGANS/PARTS Continued..

Sometimes, the organ (such as brain, heart, eyes, or other organ) may need to be kept even though the deceased body has been released to the funeral home. When this occurs, the funeral and burial or cremation may occur before the medical examiner completes the examination of the retained organ. In such cases, the medical examiner will retain the organ for a minimum of 90 days. If no request is made by the family to obtain the organ, a disposition will then be made by the medical examiner sometime after the 90-day period. This is usually accomplished by incineration.

When an organ is retained by the medical examiner, it is office policy to indicate in the autopsy report that the organ has been retained. It is the responsibility of the legal next-of-kin to contact the medical examiner if return of the organ is desired. In such cases, return can be coordinated with the funeral director who took care of the funeral arrangements in the case.

Organs are retained only when necessary to facilitate proper examination. In most cases, no whole organs are retained.

WHAT LAW GIVES AUTHORITY TO A MEDICAL EXAMINER TO ORDER AN AUTOPSY?

The Michigan County Medical Examiner Law, Act 181, P.A. 1953, as amended and the Michigan Public Health Code, Act 368, P.A. 1978, as amended, mandates that certain types of death be referred to the medical examiner for investigation. These deaths include sudden and unexpected deaths, accidental deaths, and violent deaths. The medical examiner has the authority under these Acts to order an autopsy at any time it is deemed necessary to determine or confirm the cause and manner of death.

WHEN WILL THIS AUTOPSY BE DONE?

The autopsy is generally performed on the day following death. Generally the cause and manner of death can be determined shortly after the autopsy is done, however, there are cases in which additional testing is required and the cause and manner of death may remain pending until a final determination is made. The final report usually takes up to two months to prepare due to detailed studies performed.

NOTIFY THE MEDICAL EXAMINER OR THE FUNERAL HOME OF YOUR CHOICE

Please be aware that you will be asked for the name of a funeral home so their personnel can be notified when the au-

topsy has been completed. Funeral home personnel are familiar with procedures and will make all necessary arrangements.

HOW CAN I GET A COPY OF THE AUTOPSY REPORT?

A copy of the autopsy report can be requested from the Office of the Medical Examiner by calling (517) 364-2561. There is a small charge for copies of records which includes the Investigator's report and narratives, the autopsy report and any laboratory results connected to the case. It is important to note that the autopsy report is not sent automatically to the family or physician but must be requested.

WILL THE DOCTOR RECEIVE A COPY?

Autopsy reports are not forwarded automatically to the physician. You may want to review the autopsy report with your physician and either you or the physician should call to make arrangements to have the autopsy report forwarded. If you do not have a physician, the Medical Examiner will review it with you. There is no fee when the report is forwarded to the physician.

WHAT MEDICAL RECORDS WILL I RECEIVE WHEN I REQUEST THE REPORT?

The complete record regarding the death of your loved one consists of the Medical Examiners Case Report (which

contains information regarding the medical examiner's investigation; including history of the incident, cause and manner of death, and other pertinent information regarding the death) and the autopsy report which is compiled after examination of the body, including disease processes found, toxicology, any injuries found, etc.

WHAT RECORDS WILL MY INSURANCE COMPANY NEED?

The insurance company may accept a death certificate as proof of death, however, when a death is investigated by a medical examiner, the insurance company may request an autopsy report. You can refer the insurance company to this office. Most insurance companies are aware that the autopsy and final report may take from three to four months to complete. When a copy of the records are requested, a small fee will be charged based on the County of Muskegon's Freedom of Information Act policy.

WHO PAYS FOR THIS AUTOPSY?

When an autopsy is ordered by the medical examiner, it is paid for by Muskegon County, and there is no charge to the family.