

COLLEGE OF REGISTERED PSYCHIATRIC NURSES OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

PRACTICE GUIDELINE

PRONOUNCEMENT OF DEATH

PREAMBLE

Until recently, it has been the practice in Canada for physicians to pronounce death. This is not a legal requirement. This practice is now changing and in many hospitals and care facilities it is the nurse's role to pronounce death in instances where it is anticipated and or expected.

The pronouncement of death is not a reserved act or a delegated medical function. It is within the scope of practice of the three nursing groups: RPNs, RNs and LPNs.

DEFINITION

Pronouncing death is the opinion that life has ceased. This decision is based on a physical assessment.

AGENCY POLICY REGARDING PRONOUNCING DEATH

The agency is responsible for setting policies and procedures authorizing who may pronounce death in that facility.

EXPECTED OR ANTICIPATED DEATHS

Registered Psychiatric Nurses may pronounce death when it is expected and anticipated by the health care team and where an agency policy exists that authorizes RPNs to carry out this function.

UNEXPECTED DEATH

RPNs will not pronounce death when it is unexpected. A physician must be notified immediately and in some instances the coroner and/or a peace officer must be notified.

CERTIFICATION OF DEATH

Certification of death can only be done by a coroner or a physician.

* This practice guideline was approved by the CRPNBC Board September 23, 2004 and is to be used in conjunction with agency policy.

