

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA COLLEGE OF MEDICINE – JACKSONVILLE

Resident Manual

GUIDELINES FOR FAMILY DEATH CONFERENCE

When a patient is seriously ill and it appears death is imminent, it is the responsibility of the resident physician involved (or, if they are unavoidably detained, another physician familiar with the case) to promptly notify the family or the next of kin of the gravity of the situation. Notification of death shall, whenever possible, be made in person by the attending physician. The exceptions are when a telephone call must be substituted.

When death occurs, the physician shall arrange a time as soon as possible to meet with the family to inform them of the death and circumstances relating to the death; he/she should request permission to perform an autopsy. The physician should explain the advantages of an autopsy and make certain that it is **understood that there is no charge**, the body will not be disfigured (funeral viewing will not be affected), and there will be no undue delay in release of the body. When the family is not in the city, autopsy permission may be obtained through a witnessed telephone permission from the immediate next of kin. It is recommended that the physician use the Chaplain's Office to obtain the necessary information regarding identity and whereabouts of the next of kin. The Chaplain's Office will assist the physician in making contact with the family and will provide facilities for the physician and the family to meet.

When UFHSC-J physicians are asked to sign a death certificate for a patient they have previously treated or followed as an outpatient, who died naturally outside the hospital, request for an autopsy should be made; or at least the patient's family informed of the availability of an autopsy, at no charge, if they so desire.

The Chaplain's Office will be involved in this situation and will assist in completing the forms required. Families should be escorted -- not sent -- to the appropriate office. A Chaplain is available in the hospital 24 hours a day 7 days a week to assist in completing the appropriate forms for autopsy and release of body. The Chaplain's Office is open Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., a Chaplain may be reached by calling 244-4115 or, if no answer, paging 306-3929.