

Transfer of a Deceased Person from their Place of Death

Principles for Good Practice in Residential Care Centres for Older People

When a person dies, care after death is the first step on a pathway of care that ultimately leads to burial or cremation. This pathway involves many professional groups, including nurses, doctors, healthcare assistants, porters, mortuary staff, pathologists, coroners, funeral directors and embalmers¹. These principles of good practice have been developed based on international best practice guidelines and through consultation with the Irish Hospice Foundation (IHF), Irish Association of Funeral Directors (IAFD), the Irish Division of the British Institute of Embalmers, Nursing Homes Ireland (NHI), the Health Service Executive (HSE), the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) and the Coroners Society of Ireland. They are intended to act as guidance for all professional groups to ensure that the privacy and dignity of the deceased on transfer from their place of death is maintained.

Principles for good practice for transfer of a deceased person:

1. Respecting and maintaining the personal dignity of the deceased must be the highest priority of each individual and organisation involved in the preparation and transfer of a deceased person. This should be embedded in each residential care centre's end-of-life care/after death policy.
2. The wishes of the deceased, and their families, regarding preparation of the person's body, transfer and funeral arrangements should be actively sought and respected. Families should be informed of the choice and control they have over all aspects of the funeral arrangements.
3. In most areas the coroner must be notified of all deaths². However, practice may differ between areas and it is essential to consult with your local coroner to establish what is required in your area. Best practice for the Dublin District Coroner is outlined in appendix A.
4. Where the deceased had a known or suspected infection, the HSE/HPSC Guidelines for the Management of Deceased Individuals Harboring Infectious Disease³ should be referred to.
5. Depending on the setting, the transfer may be conducted with the use of a coffin, mortuary trolley or other type of concealment trolley. Coffins and trolleys should be of high quality and appropriate for the removal of the deceased. The use of a removable concealment frame in conjunction with a drape/pall is encouraged when using a mortuary trolley or stretcher.
6. Regardless of whether a trolley or coffin is used, the removal should be conducted in a dignified and respectful manner. This includes:
 - a. manoeuvring the coffin or trolley to maximise the maintenance of dignity and in a manner acceptable to those within the residential care centre
 - b. removing gloves when moving the deceased along corridors
 - c. putting mobile phones/bleeps on silent
 - d. moving the deceased without secrecy or haste

7. An appropriate, high quality drape/pall should be used to cover the coffin/trolley when moving the deceased⁴.
8. If the family, or staff in the residential care centre have a preference regarding the use of a coffin or mortuary trolley, this should be discussed with the funeral director prior to removal. Consideration should be given to the physical environment, the physical characteristics of the deceased, manual handling, and health and safety issues when deliberating on the use of a coffin or a mortuary trolley.
9. If staff, residents, or family members wish to form a guard of honour, the funeral director/organisation responsible for the removal should be informed of this intention.

Appendix A

Guidance in relation to the Dublin District Coroner

The coroner must be notified of all deaths that occur in a residential care setting. Where a satisfactory medical certificate of death is forthcoming the coroner will release the body to the next-of-kin.

At weekends and bank holidays the medical practitioner may not always be available. In these circumstances where there is nothing untoward about a death (i.e. the death was expected or sudden but not unexpected) and the deceased cannot remain at the nursing home, by direction of the coroner the deceased may be moved to a funeral home prior to being released (by the coroner).

This can be done on the understanding that no embalming or treatments of any kind can be carried out or funeral arrangements made before release by the coroner.

A death that is unexpected or is the result of an accident or incident will be subject to a further coroner's inquiry. In this instance the body must not be moved from the residential care centre and a member of An Garda Síochána will need to be involved to identify the deceased and report to the coroner.

References

1. <http://www.nursingtimes.net/nursing-practice/clinical-zones/end-of-life-and-palliative-care/personal-care-at-the-end-of-life-and-after-death/5044559.article>
2. www.coroners.ie
3. <http://www.hpsc.ie/A-Z/LifeStages/MoDI/File.14302.en.pdf>
4. <http://endlink.lurie.northwestern.edu/>