

Completing the Death Certificate Education Module for Advanced Practice Registered Nurses

Introduction

This module was developed to implement the educational provisions in the West Virginia Code § 30-7-15d, which allows advanced practice registered nurses who have completed education and documentation requirements prescribed by the West Virginia Board of Examiners for Registered Professional Nurses (WV RN Board) to complete a medical certification of death. Emphasis is on the importance of accurately and completely certifying the cause of death, recognizing natural versus unnatural death, and referring deaths to the medical examiner when appropriate.

The death certificate is a permanent record of the fact of death and must be completed according to the provisions of West Virginia law. The death certificate provides important information about the circumstances and cause of death and may help the decedent's family attain closure and peace of mind. The death certificate is also an important source of data for state and national mortality statistics and is used to direct research, set public health goals, and measure health status. Because information derived from death certificates can be no more accurate than the information on the death certificate, it is vital that persons who certify the cause of death do so in an accurate, complete, and timely manner. (CDC, 2003)

Instructions for Advanced Practice Registered Nurse Practitioners Completing the Module:

To accomplish the objectives of this module, all the required materials must be read, and any exercises/quizzes that accompany the materials must be completed. Upon completion of the module, advanced practice registered nurses will complete an evaluation of the module and their accomplishment of the objectives. Access to the evaluation is restricted to currently licensed advanced practice registered nurses in West Virginia. By completing the evaluation, advanced practice registered nurses are

attesting to the fact that they have read the materials and completed the module. When the evaluation is submitted, a notation will be included in the advanced practice registered nurse licensing information at the WV RN Board, informing the public that the advanced practice registered nurse has completed the module. Additionally, there are supplemental readings that accompany the module, which are available for reference.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of the module, the advanced practice registered nurse will be able to:

1. Accurately and completely document the immediate cause of death and any diseases, injuries, or complications that gave rise to the immediate cause of death;
2. Accurately and completely document other important diseases that were present at the time of death and may have contributed to the death of a patient;
3. Recognize and report to the medical examiner deaths that are legally required to be reported;
4. Recognize and report to the Center for Disease Control, diseases and conditions that are legally required to be reported;
5. Adhere to the time-frames in which the death certificate must be filed according to West Virginia law; and
6. Develop an awareness of the therapeutic benefit to grieving families of an accurate, and complete certification of death.

References:

CDC (2003). *Physicians' handbook on medical certification of death*. Hyattsville, Maryland: Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics.