

General Surgery – DNAR Status, Confirming and Certifying Death

Confirming death clinically:

- No respiratory effort, denoted by the absence of breath sounds on auscultation over 1 minute
- Absence of a palpable pulse and heart sounds over 1 minute
- No response to painful stimuli e.g., sternal or supraorbital rub
- Fixed, dilated pupils
- If there is doubt, perform an ECG. Hypothermia (core temp <34 degrees) must have been corrected.

Certifying death

- If asked to certify death, after the above clinical examination, the following should be documented
 - Date and time that death was pronounced
 - Documentation of the above examination
- Document causes of death as they will appear on the death certificate; always discuss with Consultant/ registrar before, this should be done during daylight hours

Referral to the coroner

In-hospital deaths must be discussed with the coroner's office if:

- Death has occurred during an operation
- Death occurred before recovery from anesthetic
- More than 14 days had elapsed since the patient last saw a doctor
- There is doubt about the cause of death
- Death is thought to be suspicious (caused by overdoses of prescribed substances, medical error, suicide)

Death Certificate

- Can be issued by anyone with full medical qualifications who looked after the patient during their last illness or after discussion with the coroner where referral has been made.
- Death certificates/ Cremation forms are dealt with by the general office

Causes of death

- Events leading to 1a are listed in 1b, 1c.
- 2 denoted conditions that contributed to but did not directly cause death.
- These should be discussed with the consultant.

Do Not Attempt Resuscitation orders

- DNAR orders should be considered where cardio-pulmonary resuscitation in the event of cardiac or respiratory arrest is considered futile. This decision is made by a registrar/ consultant for a definitive or indefinite period and is Signed off by the Consultant.
- Some patients may have DNAR forms put in the community