

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER 2:16  
(Revised 11/1/77)

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

EFFECTIVE DATE: 1 November 1977 DATE ISSUED: 15 October 1977

SUBJECT: Notification of Critical Status or  
Death of Patients or Residents

This Administrative Order establishes the policies, procedures and concerns for discharging the Department's responsibilities for notifying the next of kin of critical status or death of patients and residents. It is important that all contact with the next of kin be made with the utmost consideration and appropriate expressions of sympathy as to a friend or family member.

I. GENERAL POLICIES

- A. Next of kin shall be interpreted to mean spouse, mother, father, guardian, persons connected by birth or marriage, or other persons so indicated on official records.
- B. Chief Executive Officers of institutions shall be responsible for procedures to insure that next of kin, in order enumerated above (except when parents are separated and then both), shall be notified by telephone of critical status or death of patients or residents. In case the next of kin is without a telephone, the local police or State Police in the community are to be contacted and requested to advise the next of kin to contact the institution immediately. Only if contact cannot be made through the preceding efforts a suitable telegram shall be sent, return receipt requested.
- C. In addition a "critical status" or "notification of death" letter conveying an appropriate message of condolence in the case of a death, and confirming the telephone conversation, shall be sent to the next of kin no later than the following day.

- D. Confirmation of the telephone communication and a copy of the letter shall be placed in the appropriate record.
- E. Requests for autopsies, other than those required by the County Medical Examiner, shall be made in writing by the medical staff person making the request, stating the reasons for such a request, and shall be placed in the appropriate record.
- F. In the event of a patient's or resident's death or critical status, when possible, either the chaplain or a suitable religious representative should be present when the family arrives at the institution.
- G. In the event of a patient's or resident's death, when appropriate, a staff member may be permitted to attend the funeral as a representative of the institution without loss of pay.
- H. When the individual recovers and is removed from the critical list, the next of kin should again be informed as outlined above.
- I. The attached sample telegrams and letter may be used as a guide in notifying the next of kin of death of patients or residents, or adapted for notification of critical status.



Ann Klein  
Commissioner

ATTACHMENT

## SAMPLE TELEGRAM

Regret to advise that (name of relative) passed away this (morning, afternoon or evening.) Please accept our sincere sympathy. You may contact Dr. (name of attending physician) or Chief Executive Officer if you have any questions. Please have your funeral director contact us regarding funeral arrangements.

If an autopsy is desired:

Regret to advise that (name of relative) passed away this (morning, afternoon or evening.) Please accept our sincere sympathy. We are requesting permission to perform a postmortem examination. Please wire permission by collect telegram. You may contact Dr. (name of attending physician) if you have any questions. Please have your funeral director contact us regarding funeral arrangements.

## SAMPLE CONDOLENCE LETTER

Dear (Name of relative)

It was with deep regret that we had to inform you of the death of your (relationship), (name of patient.) If there is any way in which we may be of help, please don't hesitate to call us. (Any pertinent information as to nature of illness, alleviation of suffering, etc. that may be of comfort to the family should be added.)

Sincerely,

Medical Director