

Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital Policy and Procedure		
Death of a Hospitalized Person		
Effective: April 2024	Revised: June 2024	Due to Review: June 2026

POLICY

Except for in rare circumstances when death is anticipated and where an explicit and documented end of life plan is to be carried out by the Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital (VPCH), instances of imminent or presumed death will be considered a medical emergency and treated in accordance with applicable VPCH policy. The following procedure identifies areas of responsibility in the care of the deceased at the time of death, should death, in accordance with such an established plan, occur at VPCH.

PROCEDURE

By law, all pronounced deaths that occur at VPCH require investigation by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (CME) and the Vermont State Police (VSP). The CME, working with the State's Attorney and VSP, will determine the degree of investigation required. The State's Attorney shall oversee the deceased. The deceased shall not be moved or otherwise disturbed without the State's Attorney's instruction to do so. If authorized by the State's Attorney, the deceased may be relocated to a secure room to serve as a temporary holding area until transport is available. If possible, the area should be locked.

Only a physician may pronounce death. Within one hour of pronouncing death, the physician shall inform the VPCH Executive Medical Officer or designee, the VPCH Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or designee, the CME or Assistant Medical Examiner, and the New England Organ Bank (NEOB) in accordance with VPCH policy for organ donation. The physician, along with a Quality Department representative, and other members of the treatment team as may be appropriate, shall attempt to notify the family, guardian, significant other, or other designated representative. If the person(s) to be notified cannot be reached, the local police in that person's community may be contacted for assistance with home notification.

If the deceased or legally authorized representative specified preferences for funeral arrangements, these shall be honored. If no preferences were specified, it is the responsibility of the next of kin to identify the funeral home of their choice and for coordinating with that funeral home. Next of kin will also be responsible for any incurred expenses, including transport of the deceased. If no preferences have been specified, and next of kin cannot be reached, VPCH will work with a local funeral home to make the arrangements. When there are no burial funds, the State will be responsible for expenses.

Postmortem care is not performed at VPCH and VPCH will not transport the deceased. Transport will occur only after clearance from the State's Attorney. The funeral home will transport the deceased to either the CME or to a funeral home as directed by the State's Attorney.

Required Notifications

The following table outlines the notifications that shall occur within 1-hour post-mortem and identifies the responsible party.

Party to be Notified	Responsible Party
Vermont State Medical Examiner – 1-888- 552-2952	Pronouncing Physician (Medical Examiner who receives this call will then notify the State's Attorney).
New England Organ Bank (NEOB) – 1-800-446- 6362	Pronouncing Physician *Notification to the NEOB shall occur as soon as reasonably feasible.
VPCH Executive Medical Officer (EMO)	Pronouncing Physician (EMO will notify the individual's attending provider)
VPCH Chief Executive Officer (CEO), or their designee	Pronouncing Physician
DMH Commissioner	VPCH CEO, or their designee
Vermont State Police	VPCH CEO, or their designee
VPCH Quality Department	VPCH CEO, or their designee (the VPCH Quality Department will perform subsequent action steps in accordance with VPCH event reporting policy, including root cause analysis and external reporting).

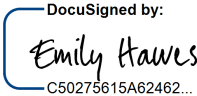
Documentation

Nursing: In addition to completing the routine nursing documentation and an event report, the assigned nurse shall also complete a nursing note indicating that the on-duty Nursing Supervisor was notified of the expiration, the time of death, the pronouncing physician, and any post-mortem arrangements that are in place at the time the note is entered.

Pronouncing Physician: The physician shall complete a narrative note identifying the date and time of expiration, presumed cause of death, indicating the notifications that were completed, and any successful or unsuccessful attempts to notify the next of kin.

Milieu Management

The Nursing Supervisor or designee and the on-duty physician, in consultation with the Executive Medical Officer, shall determine whether to inform other hospitalized individuals of the death. If it is decided to inform, consideration shall be given to how and when it would be best to communicate this information and the clinical impact this may have. Additional support will be determined in accordance with the individual circumstance.

Approved by	Signature	Date
Emily Hawes, Commissioner, Vermont Department of Mental Health	 C50275615A62462...	6/25/2024