Medical Certifier Requirements for Completing Death Certificate

Why is the death certificate so important?

Certifying a death certificate is an important final step in completing a patient's care.

Families cannot proceed with business without a completed death certificate. The death certificate is required for:
- Probating estates
- Insurance Claims
- Social Security
- Veterans' benefits
- Retirement benefits

State and National Public Health Statistics
- All conditions are reported and analyzed by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS)
- Unintentional injury, suicide and homicide related deaths
- Infant deaths
- Occupation-related deaths

Who should sign the certificate?

Was this your patient; were you the attending physician; were you prescribing medication for an ongoing illness or condition; were you covering for an out of town colleague? If so, you are the best person to complete the medical certification of death.

(KRS 213.076)
Kentucky Statute states that the medical certification shall be completed, signed, and returned to the funeral director within five working days after presentation to the physician, dentist, or chiropractor in charge of the patient’s care for the illness or condition which resulted in death, except when inquiry is required by KRS 72.400 to 72.475. In such cases, the coroner shall complete and sign the certificate within five days after receiving results of the inquiry as required by KRS 72.400 to 72.475. In the absence of the physician, dentist, or chiropractor, or with such person’s approval, the certificate required by KRS 199.570(3). If a certificate is incomplete, the local registrar shall immediately notify the responsible person and require that person to supply the missing items, if that information can be obtained.

(KRS 72.400) (3) No certificate shall be held to be complete and correct that does not supply all items of information called for therein or satisfactorily account for their omission, except as provided in KRS 199.570(3). If a certificate is incomplete, the local registrar shall immediately notify the responsible person and require that person to supply the missing items, if that information can be obtained.

Who signs the certificate when the patient dies at home?

The Coroner unless he/she determines that the attending physician has sufficient knowledge to reasonably state the cause of death occurring under natural circumstances, the coroner may authorize that physician to complete the medical certification of death. The Coroner shall notify the Vital Statistics Branch, the coroner shall notify the Vital Statistics Branch

(KRS 72.410) (2) In the event an autopsy is performed under the provisions of KRS 72.410 to 72.470 subsequent to the time that a death certificate has been filed with the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, Vital Statistics Branch, the coroner shall notify the Vital Statistics Branch of any change that may be necessary in the original certificate.

How long do I have to complete the death certificate?
The medical certification shall be completed, signed, and returned to the funeral director within five working days after presentation.

(KRS 213.076) (1) states, “The funeral director, or person acting as such, shall within five days of the death, present the certificate to the attending physician, if any, or to the health officer or coroner as directed by the state registrar, for the medical certificate of the cause of death and other particulars necessary to complete the record as required by this chapter.”

(KRS 213.076) (3) states, “The medical certification shall be completed, signed, and returned to the funeral director within five working days after presentation to the physician, dentist, or chiropractor in charge of the patient’s care for the illness or condition which resulted in death, except when inquiry is required by KRS 72.400 to 72.475.” In such cases, and if the cause of death is unknown or under investigation, the cause of death shall be shown as such on the certificate. A supplemental report providing the medical information omitted from the original certificate shall be filed by the certifier with the state registrar within five days after receiving results of the inquiry as required by KRS 72.400 to 72.475. The supplemental report shall be made a part of the existing death certificate. This report shall be considered an amendment, and the death certificate shall be marked “Amended.”

What must be reported to the Coroner?

(Any death which occurred under causes other than natural)
- Homicide
- Suicide
- Presence of drugs or poisons
- Motor vehicle accidents
- Bodies found near roadway or railway
- Deaths in police custody, mental institutions or penal institutions
- Death from fire or explosion
- Finding human remains/skeletons
- Drowning
- Sudden Infant Deaths
- Death of person under age 40 with no past medical history to explain the death
- When a body is to be cremated and there is no past medical history to explain the death
- Sudden and unexplained deaths
- Death occurs more than 36 hours after the decedent was last treated or attended by a physician, dentist, or chiropractor

Responsibility for medical information
In order for a record to be accepted for filing, certain medical items must be completed. The physician’s signature on the record indicates concurrence that all medically related information provided is accurate and true, to the best of his or her knowledge. The physician and funeral director must work together to ensure a complete record is filed.