

- Policy:** The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) is responsible for issuing death certificates for all deaths investigated pursuant to DC Code § 5-1403 and 1409.
- Purpose:** To ensure efficient and timely filing of death certificates with Washington DC Department of Health Vital Records Division (VRD).
- Scope:** The following procedure is to assist the ID Unit and any OCME staff member tasked with completing death certificates.
- Definitions:** COD – Cause of death  
CMS – Case management system  
EDRS-VITA – Electronic Death Registration System  
ID Unit – Identification Unit  
PON – physician assigned daily to handle charts

## **1. ID UNIT RESPONSIBILITY**

### **1.1. Initiating a Death Certificate**

- 1.1.1. ID Unit staff initiates a death certificate within the Electronic Death Register System (EDRS) – VITA after the decedent is positively identified and the Cause of Death Determination (COD) form is received from the medical examiner.
- 1.1.2. Step by step instructions for creating a death certificate are provided in the EDRS Training Manual.
- 1.1.3. A copy of the death certificate is printed and placed in the case chart.
- 1.1.4. The ID Unit staff updates the Release Checklist within CMS to document who typed the death certificate.

### **1.2. Peer review**

- 1.2.1. After the death certificate is created, the case file is passed to another ID Unit staff member for peer review.
- 1.2.2. The peer reviewer cross references the hard copy of the death certificate, COD form, CMS entry and EDRS-VITA entry for accuracy.
  - 1.2.2.1. When necessary, the originator makes corrections to the death certificate.
- 1.2.3. Once the death certificate is error free, the peer reviewer initial and dates the hard copy of the death certificate and returns it to the chart.

### **1.3. Certification of the Death Certificate**

- 1.3.1. Within EDRS-VITA, the ID Unit staff request certification and selects the medical examiner that performed the examination from the dropdown list.
- 1.3.2. When the medical examiner is out of the office, the ID Unit staff selects the physician assigned to charts (PON).

#### 1.4. Releasing a Death Certificate

- 1.4.1. When a decedent is scheduled to be released, ID Unit staff prints three copies of the certified death certificate.
  - 1.4.1.1. A complete copy and the first page of a second copy are placed in the case chart.
  - 1.4.1.2. The transit permit (second page) is placed in the release chart.
  - 1.4.1.3. A complete copy is filed in the Death Certificate binder.
- 1.4.2. After the decedent is released, the death certificate is assigned to the appropriate funeral home within EDRS-VITA and transferred.

## 2. MEDICAL EXAMINER'S RESPONSIBILITY

- 2.1. Upon completion of a medicolegal case examination, the medical examiner assigned to the case generated a COD form from CMS and submits it to the ID Unit.
- 2.2. Certifying a Death Certificate
  - 2.2.1. Each medical examiner logs into EDRS-VITA daily and checks his/her queue for death certificates requiring certification and completes the following:
    - 2.2.1.1. Verifies the information is accurate;
      - 2.2.1.1.1. If information is incorrect, the medical examiner asks the ID Unit to correct the error.
    - 2.2.1.2. Clicks the certify button within EDRS-VITA and enters his/her pin number.
  - 2.2.2. The PON checks his/her queue regularly throughout business hours and certifies all death certificates in the queue.

## 3. CHANGES TO A DEATH CERTIFICATE

- 3.1. Prior to release of a decedent and death certificate to a funeral home, the death certificate may be changed.
  - 3.1.1. The examining medical examiner submits the Amended COD form to the ID Unit. The ID Unit transfers the death certificate to the medical examiner within EDRS-VITA for un-signature.
  - 3.1.2. The medical examiner un-esigns the death certificate and revises it or asks the ID Unit staff to revise it.

3.1.3. The medical examiner re-signs the death certificate.