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FACILITY: HSHS Sacred Heart Hospital HSHS St. Joseph's Hospital	MANUAL(S): Ethics Policies
TITLE: Determination of Death	ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT: Spiritual Care

I. POLICY:

A Registered Nurse may recognize and document death – only licensed physicians and coroners may pronounce death and sign death certificates. The one exception is: “A Registered Nurse, licensed in Wisconsin, and who is employed by or under contract to a Wisconsin-licensed hospice program, may pronounce death if the decedent dies while under hospice care and is under the general care of a physician at the time of death” (2003 Wisconsin Act 273)

II. PURPOSE:

- A. To follow the guidelines set forth in the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services (#62)* and meet legal requirements as set forth in the Wisconsin Statutes, Section 146.71 - Determination of Death.
- B. To provide the basis for appropriate medical record documentation.

III. DEFINITION:

Per Wisconsin Statutes, Section 146.71-Determination of Death, an individual who has sustained either irreversible cessation of circulatory and respiratory functions or irreversible cessations of all functions of the entire brain, including the brain stem, is dead. A determination of death shall be made in accordance with accepted medical standards.

IV. GUIDELINES/PROCEDURES:

- A. Death is documented by:
 - 1. Absent vital signs
 - 2. Lack of neuromuscular response
 - 3. ECG, if necessary, flat line for three minutes.
- B. If a physician is present or responds in person to a summons to observe the condition of an individual who appears to have expired, the date and time of death is the date and time the physician actually made the pronouncement of death.
- C. A registered nurse may report absence of vital signs to a physician by telephone.
- D. The nurse should report to the physician immediately upon observation of the apparent death. The physician may then exercise professional judgment in pronouncing the individual dead. There should be no unnecessary delay in reporting to the physician. The nurse should record the information given to the physician and the physician's response in the person's medical record.
- E. The date and time of death that is recorded in the medical record must reflect the date and time of the pronouncement of death by the physician, coroner, deputy coroner, medical examiner or deputy medical examiner.
- F. Registered Nurse will notify consulting physicians in a timely manner of the patient's death.