**Cause of Death Statements – Basic Principles and Important Notices**

Regardless of who fills out the death certificate, only a physician with a full and unrestricted Colorado license may sign it.

There can be no mistakes on the form (crossed-out items, or white-out). If any mistakes are made a NEW FORM must be filled out. So think ahead about what you are going to put on the form and write legibly (people in the State Health Dept. will have to decipher the handwriting in order to assign proper codes to the diagnoses).

The cause of death statement has two parts. Part I is designed so that a sequence of conditions leading to the death may be reported.

Example 1:
- A. Upper gastrointestinal hemorrhage “Due to, or as a consequence of”
- B. Ruptured esophageal varices “Due to, or as a consequence of”
- C. Cirrhosis of the liver “Due to, or as a consequence of”
- D. Chronic Alcohol Abuse

In this example, the immediate cause of death is upper gastrointestinal hemorrhage, and the underlying cause of death is chronic alcohol abuse.

Example 2:
- A. Gram-negative sepsis “Due to, or as a consequence of”
- B. Urinary bladder infection “Due to, or as a consequence of”
- C. Indwelling catheter for neurogenic bladder “Due to, or as a consequence of”
- D. Multiple Sclerosis

In this example, the immediate cause of death is gram-negative sepsis, and the underlying cause of death is Multiple Sclerosis.

The underlying cause of death is the “first domino to fall-over”; no matter how long ago it happened. The immediate and underlying cause of death might be the same.

Part II lists other significant conditions, which contributed to the death, but not resulting in the underlying cause of death listed in Part I.

For each line item in the cause of death statement, do your best to write down a time interval for that item. (i.e., acute MI (2 days) due to diabetes (20 years))

It is acceptable to use terms such as “probable” or “presumed”.

DO NOT list mechanistic terminal events such as:
- cardiac arrest
- asystole
- cardiopulmonary arrest
- ventricular fibrillation
- respiratory arrest
DO NOT report signs or symptoms.
DO NOT oversimplify.
DO NOT use abbreviations or acronyms.

Why it is important? It is a permanent legal document. The cause of death information is assigned a code and becomes a part of our state and national mortality database maintained by the National Center for Healthcare Statistics.

Tutorial available through the National Association of Medical Examiners Website http://thename.org/