

## Cause of Death – Finding Out

### Finding out the cause of death

The doctor who has been caring for your relative will be able to advise you of the cause of death. There are some instances (listed below) when a death needs to be reported to the Coroner and the cause of death determined by an autopsy.

### What is an autopsy?







An autopsy is a medical examination and involves a full internal and external examination of the deceased body. It may be necessary to take samples of tissues, organs and blood for further analysis. The procedure is like a surgical operation and all care and respect is shown to the deceased.

Although some people initially feel uncomfortable about an autopsy being required for the deceased, most people later say that it was helpful to know the cause of death. The examination will often answer many questions for people and can be an important part of grieving.



### What is a reportable death?

Police must report a death to the Coroner when a doctor cannot issue the death certificate because the person has died:

Without having seen a doctor in the last three months:

-  Due to unnatural (violent or unexpected) causes
-  Resulting from an accident or injury
-  In a psychiatric hospital
-  In prison or in the custody of a member of the police force
-  During or as a result of an anaesthetic, or
-  With an unknown identity

The Coroner is also responsible for:

-  Explaining the facts of what they've found in their investigations, then make recommendations on how to prevent the situation from happening again
-  Investigation of fires which have public significance



- Arrangement of all reportable deaths to be registered
- Holding public inquests to inform the community and government of investigations and then compiling this information into a public document

### **What does the Coroner do once a death has been reported?**

The first step is identification of the deceased, and the Coroner usually asks for a family member or close friend to help identify the body. This can be done either at the place of death in the presence of the police or the Coroner's office.

The Coroner will then attempt to determine the cause of death and studies the body for any signs of injury or abuse. An autopsy (post mortem) may be conducted. The presence of bruising, skin puncture marks, poison or narcotics in the body and the location of wounds can provide vital clues to the cause of death. These signs will help determine if the death was self-inflicted, accidental or intended.

The Coroner will attempt to conduct their investigations as quickly as possible as they are sensitive to the fact that the relatives would not want the funeral to be postponed for a long period of time. When their investigations are completed they will release the body of the deceased to Wollongong City Funerals to conduct the funeral service.

