

## **Confidentiality of Death Certificates**

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES  
HEALTH DIVISION

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December 12, 1997

TO: County Vital Records Registrars and Deputies  
FROM: Sharon Rice, Manager, Registration Unit Center for  
Health Statistics

**SUBJECT: CONFIDENTIALITY—DEATH WITH DIGNITY**

This memo is to insure your continued support of the Vital Records strict code of confidentiality on all birth and death certificates.

You received a memo dated November 18, 1997 from Edward Johnson, II, State Registrar. In this memo he discussed the necessity of protecting the privacy of all parties when a death occurs by means of Oregon's death with dignity law.

I have received several calls from different counties asking for more information. After discussing these concerns with the Registrar and physicians within the Health Division the following rules will apply to all physician assisted deaths.

You will neither confirm nor deny if a death has occurred in your county. If this question is asked by employees within your own Health Department, those calls should be referred to Edward Johnson, II, State Registrar (503) 731-4109 or Katrina Hedberg, M.D. (503) 731-4024. If you are asked for information from any other source on this specific topic, those callers will be referred to Katrina Hedberg, M.D., Oregon Health Division, (503) 731-4024. Do not refer callers to me as I am not at liberty to discuss this topic, and I would only have to refer the caller again.

We will begin asking funeral directors to direct report all physicians assisted death certificates to this office thus eliminating the registration through the county office. This will assist in maintaining the confidentiality in your office. Only limited staff in records will be aware of this type of death, as these records will not be handled through regular channels. We will also be controlling the issuance of certified copies making sure the family is aware of the new abbreviated copies and recommending they receive this type of certified copy.

If the funeral home chooses to forward the death record to your office, you may forward it to this office for registration. You should not maintain a white copy of the death record for six months nor should you issue certified copies.

If you do register the death locally then you may not maintain a six-month copy of the death record. Before issuing any certified copies of the death record you will need to contact this office for special permission to do so. There are three people in this office that can grant that permission:

Edward Johnson, II—State Registrar (503) 731-4109

Carol Sanders, Manager, Certification Unit 731-4416

Sharon Rice, Manager, Registration Unit 731-4412

Since we do not anticipate a large number of these cases, the different rules for the handling, these deaths should not adversely affect your work. You may never have this type of death occur within your county.

If you haven't by now determined the seriousness of this, let me add one additional statement so you will know how seriously this matter is being taken by the State Health Division. Any staff within the Center for Health Statistics that reveals any information they are not authorized to release, will immediately be terminated. Any county vital records staff, releasing information will have their registrar-deputy registrar commissions immediately revoked, thus eliminating you from having any contact with vital records within your county.

Remember if you are asked if any physician assisted deaths have occurred in your county you may neither confirm nor deny their occurrence. This may put you in a difficult position if you are being asked from Personnel within your own health department. Again, you will need to explain that you have been told you are not to discuss this topic with anyone, and refer the caller as mentioned earlier in this memo.