

Complete Death Certificates Electronically: It's the Law

What is ROVER?

ROVER is an electronic death registration program that allows physicians and funeral homes to file death records with the Oklahoma State Registrar electronically.

Why should I use ROVER?

For your convenience...

ROVER is:

- Paperless
- FREE to use
- Available 24/7
- Saves you time
- Highly secure, Internet accessible
- Training and Registration at no cost
- Self-training option, or we'll come to you
- Certify from anywhere with internet access
- Improves the quality of death data reporting
- Electronic filing of death records, no forms to mail
- Staff members can create the record for you to certify
- AskRover Helpdesk support available by email or phone
- Refer cases electronically to the Medical Examiner or Funeral Homes

The Law

The inundation of medical, legal, insurance and government paperwork understandably might make physicians and their staffs who routinely deal with a limited number of death cases assign a low priority to death certificates requests. But Oklahoma law is quite clear. In accordance with Oklahoma Statutes [63 O.S. § 1-317(a)]: "No later than July 1, 2017, physicians licensed in this state shall be required to sign and file death certificates using the prescribed electronic system." Also according to Oklahoma Statutes, a death certificate "shall be filed with the State Department of Health within three days after such death".

Final Act of Service

The failure to file death certificates promptly may cause probate, insurance and/or financial problems for an already grieving family. ROVER electronic registration speeds up the creation of the death certificate, and makes it easier to help families and loved ones through a difficult time, and assist with getting financial and personal matters cleared up. Using ROVER reduces turnaround time for families by 50% or more.

Initiating the Electronic Record

Funeral directors initiate the process by entering the deceased's personal data on the death certificate, which must be delivered to the "physician in charge of the patient's

care for the illness or condition that resulted in death” or medical examiner within twenty-four (24) hours after the death. The physician then has forty-eight (48) hours to complete, sign and return the medical certification portion of the death certificate to the funeral director.

Physicians are required to certify “natural” deaths. All other deaths are referred to the Medical Examiner. Medical Examiner cases include: all violent deaths, whether self-induced or not; deaths under suspicious, unusual or unnatural circumstances; deaths related to disease which constitute a threat to public health; deaths unattended by a licensed MD/DO for a fatal or potentially fatal illness; deaths after unexplained coma; deaths that are medically unexpected and that occur in the course of a therapeutic procedure; deaths of incarcerated individuals; and deaths of persons whose bodies are to be cremated, buried at sea, transported out of state, or otherwise made unavailable for pathological study.

College of American Pathologists Weigh In

In discussing death certificates, the College of American Pathologists (CAP) notes that “the physician, coroner or medical examiner who indicates the cause of death on a death certificate and signs the certificate attesting to the cause of death is referred to as the certifier. The certifier may or may not be the same person who was responsible for the care of the patient (the attending physician) or who pronounced the person dead (the pronouncing physician).”

Who certifies death when the physician in charge of the patient is not present at the death? Oklahoma law states: “In the event that the physician in charge of the patient’s care for the illness or condition which resulted in death is not in attendance at the time of death, the medical certification shall be completed and signed within forty eight (48) hours after the death by the physician in attendance at the time of death...Provided that such certification, if signed by other than the attending physician, shall note on the face the name of the attending physician and the information shown is only as reported.” [63 O.S. § 1-317(d)]

CAP recognizes that some physicians may be hesitant to certify death if they do not know the exact cause of death. CAP says: “Such hesitancy is usually unwarranted. Although the cause of death should ideally be accurate and specific, legally it is not a guarantee of accuracy...In essence, the cause of death as stated is the best opinion of the certifier.”

Legal VS. Scientific Document

Professional liability should not be a concern when completing death certificates. Remember, the death certificate is a legal rather than a scientific document. The physician is not required to establish a specific anatomical reason for the death. A description of the general disease process or the condition most likely responsible for the death is acceptable.

Enrollment

ROVER training can be either online or in-person. If you choose the online training, there is a quiz and an information form that is required to be completed and returned to OSDH. The online training should only take about 30 minutes or less. To begin either online or in-person training, email Askrover@health.ok.gov, or call 405-271-5380, and a Field Service Representative will assist you.