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Coroner Information

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Why is the coroner called when death is due to natural causes?

A coroner must not only investigate all unnatural deaths such as those due to foul play, suicide, accident, negligence, malpractice, but must also investigate certain natural deaths such as sudden and unexpected, from illness not under treatment by a qualified physician; those occurring in certain types of institutions such as nursing homes, homes for the aged, and whenever questions can only be answered fairly after an investigation.

Who calls the coroner?

Any person who has reason to believe that a death has occurred under the circumstances set out in The Coroners Act must immediately notify a coroner. This is usually a doctor, a nurse, or a police officer but it could be any member of the public.

Is an autopsy required in every case?

No. The coroner's training and experience enables him/her to decide if the findings required by law can be determined without an autopsy (post mortem examination). About 30% of all coroners' investigations require medical-legal autopsies.

Is consent required for a medical-legal autopsy?

No, but where there are objections the coroner will explain the need for the autopsy. The findings of the examination may have important implications for estate or insurance purposes and will often help to answer questions regarding hereditary aspects of disease, as well as prevent anxiety from not knowing what actually caused the death.

Who performs the autopsy?

The coroner directs a qualified specialist usually a pathologist, to conduct the examination and may request special examination of particular organs or fluids by other experts.

Will an autopsy disfigure the body?

The coroner and pathologist are sensitive to the wishes of families and friends who may wish to view the deceased at the funeral home. The examination is conducted in such a way that ordinary viewing does not reveal the fact.

Will an autopsy delay funeral arrangements?

In most cases the answer is no. However, some aspects of the investigation, identification for example, may cause delay. Your funeral director will advise you as to time of viewing arrangements, etc.

How is information obtained?

Information pertaining to the death may be obtained from the coroner as it becomes available. When the investigation is complete, the coroner will provide on request to the immediate family (spouse, partner, parent, child, brother, sister) or personal representative, a copy of the coroner's investigation statement. This statement includes information as to date and place, cause and means of death and relevant post mortem findings.

Does the family receive a copy of the Medical Certificate of Death?

One Medical Certificate of Death is issued and cannot be copied. It is retained by the Registrar General who will supply a certificate on request (there may be a fee) showing the name, date, and place of death. (www.ontario.ca)

What other certificates are available?

Your insurance agent will advise you what is required in order to file a claim for death benefits. In most cases, a Proof of Death claim form is provided by the insurance company and should be sent to the coroner for completion. The coroner may not have all of the information required for several weeks after the death. A fee is chargeable for this service. In some cases, for example the Canada Pension Plan, a certificate issued by the funeral director is accepted.

(The Ontario Coroners Association)



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