

Department of Health Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission Advisory Opinion

The Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission (NCQAC) issues this advisory opinion in accordance with WAC 246-840-800. An advisory opinion adopted by the NCQAC is an official opinion about safe nursing practice. The opinion is not legally binding and does not have the force and effect of a duly promulgated regulation or a declaratory ruling by the NCQAC. Institutional policies may restrict practice further in their setting and/or require additional expectations to assure the safety of their patient and/or decrease risk.

<i>Title:</i>	Completion of Death Certificates by Advanced Registered Nurse Practitioners	<i>Number:</i> NCAO 10.0
<i>References:</i>	RCW 18.79 Nursing Care WAC 246-840 Practical and Registered Nursing RCW 70.58 Vital Statistics WAC 246-491 Vital Statistics-Certificates	
<i>Contact:</i>	Deborah Carlson, MSN, RN Associate Director of Nursing Practice	
<i>Phone:</i>	(360) 236-4725	
<i>Email:</i>	NursingPracticeConsultation.NCQAC@doh.wa.gov	
<i>Effective Date:</i>	November 18, 2016	
<i>Supersedes:</i>	Not Applicable	
<i>Approved By:</i>	Charlotte Foster, Chair Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission	

Conclusion Statement

The Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission (NCQAC) concludes that an advanced registered nurse Practitioner (ARNP) may complete death certificates following statues and rules. It is not within the scope of practice of a registered nurse or licensed practical nurse to certify a death.

Background

The Washington State Department of Health Center for Health Statistics requested the NCQAC to consider adopting guidelines developed by the center as a standard of care for ARNPs to follow when certifying a death. [RCW 70.58](#) gives the authority for an ARNP to certify a death, including a fetal death. The department receives complaints that health care providers fail to complete death certificates in a timely manner or fail to accurately list the cause of death. The death certificate serves different medical, statistical, and legal functions.

Recommendations

The NCQAC recommends an ARNP follow the Washington State Department of Health Center for Health Statistics “Completion of Death Certificates Guideline” as a standard of care.

Conclusion

In conclusion, ARNPs may certify a death following the laws and within acceptable standards of care.

References

Medical Quality Assurance Commission. (2011, September). Death Certificate Rules Revisited. Update! Volume 1, Fall. p. 10: www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/Pubs/658004.pdf.

Physicians Handbook on Medical Certification of Death. U.S. Department of Human and health Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, 2003 Revision, page 1: https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/misc/hb_cod.pdf