Bereavement and Resource Guide

University Medical Center New Orleans
WHEN YOUR LOVED ONE DIES

The loss of a loved one, whether suddenly or following a long illness, is extremely difficult. The days that follow will be a time of grief and sorrow. There will also be a number of tasks that will need to be dealt with.

This pamphlet is offered to help guide you through some of the steps that now need to be taken. Also included is contact information and resources that might be helpful to you during this time.
HOSPITAL PROCEDURE FOLLOWING A PATIENT DEATH

Care after a patient’s death is very important to us at University Medical Center New Orleans (UMCNO). Our staff will treat your loved one with the utmost respect, and we will do our best to honor the wishes of the patient’s family and/or the next of kin. You will be able to spend time with your loved one following the nurse’s preparation of a quiet environment to say your goodbyes.

AUTOPSY

UMCNO offers the benefit of an autopsy in all hospital deaths. There is no charge to the patient or the family for these services. An autopsy is performed by a physician pathologist for a variety of purposes and intents, which may be as simple as the family’s peace of mind. The purpose might also extend to honoring our commitment to continually seeking opportunities to extend our medical knowledge from every patient care experience. A family sometimes will request an autopsy. In certain situations, Louisiana law obligates facilities to conduct autopsies. This can be explained to you upon request.

A UMCNO autopsy does not typically delay any funeral arrangements and does not prevent an open-casket funeral. To obtain the results of the autopsy performed at UMCNO, please contact the Release of Information office at (504) 702-2082. If the autopsy was performed by a Coroner’s office, please contact the coroner’s office directly for results. Results can take up to three months for completion.
The Louisiana Organ Procurement Agency (LOPA) is a not-for-profit organ and tissue recovery agency designated by the federal government to work with hospitals and other partners throughout the state of Louisiana, such as the eye bank, to save and enhance lives through the transplant of recovered organs, tissue and eyes. One organ donor can save the lives of up to nine people; one tissue donor can enhance the lives of up to 50 people; one eye donor can restore sight for up to six people. There is no charge for donation, as it is a gift of life to others. For more information, go to www.LOPA.org.

Body donation to science cannot be done unless prior donation arrangements (before death) have been made and the appropriate documentation papers are presented to UMCNO that show the acceptance of the donation. Your forms must be on file with the Department of Health and Hospitals Bureau of Anatomical Services at least 60 days before death in order to be considered a registered donor. If death occurs prior to the end of the 60-day waiting period, the donation still may be made if the family or estate pays for all the transportation charges.

There are some instances in which the donation will not be accepted even if previously accepted, such as if an autopsy is performed, an infectious disease is present (hepatitis, HIV, or sepsis), or the body has been severely damaged in an accident or trauma.

For more information, you may go to the Department of Health and Hospitals Bureau of Anatomical Services website at www.medschool.lsuhssc.edu/cell_biology/anatomical_services.aspx or contact them at (504) 568-4012 or (504) 568-2165.
PERSONAL BELONGINGS

Obtaining Patient’s Valuables
A patient’s valuables (money, jewelry, etc.) may be obtained by the patient’s legal next of kin from the Hospital Public Safety Office, located in room 2673 on the second floor of University Medical Center Diagnostic & Testing (Hospital) Building. You can pick them up anytime, around the clock. Please note: You must have a picture ID and you will be required to sign a statement that you are the patient’s legal next of kin. You may be asked to provide and show legal documentation, such as a birth certificate or marriage certificate showing your relationship to the patient. Call the Hospital Public Safety office at (504) 702-3108 for instructions or additional information.

Obtaining A Patient’s Clothing
You should have received your loved one’s clothes from the patient care area. Please Note: In the event that your loved one died as the result of an act of violence, clothing is taken by homicide detectives and is considered legal evidence. In this situation, clothing will not be given to the family. There also may be some instances in which the clothing is soiled or damaged beyond repair and will be disposed of by hospital staff.

CONTACTING THE FUNERAL HOME AND TRANSPORTING YOUR LOVED ONE

You will need to contact a funeral home of your choice as soon as possible. If you need help, please ask UMCNO staff how they might assist you.

Your loved one’s body will be released as soon as possible to the funeral home of choice. UMCNO has processes in place to safely guarantee the release to your specified funeral home of choice. In most cases the body will be released to the funeral home the following morning after 10 a.m. unless an autopsy is to be performed in which case release is usually later that day. UMCNO is unable to store your loved one’s remains for a long period of time, so please make arrangements as soon as possible. After 30 days, or if at capacity, the remains will be moved to the Coroner’s office, and you will need to make arrangements directly with the Coroner’s office after that time.
When contacting the funeral home, you will need to have your deceased loved one’s full name, date of birth and Social Security Number readily available. The funeral home will often require a deposit before they will accept your loved one.

- Make an appointment with the funeral director to discuss and finalize funeral arrangements and their services.
- The funeral director is a trained professional and will assist and advise you in many areas, such as types of casket, clothes for your loved one to be buried in, cremation, etc. The funeral director will contact your cemetery and can notify the newspaper for publishing an obituary.

**OBTAINING A DEATH CERTIFICATE**

Once your loved one is picked up by your chosen funeral home the funeral home will enter the necessary information into a Louisiana database and create the death certificate. This process may take several days to fully complete. Certified copies of the death certificate are obtained from the funeral director. It is advisable that you order multiple copies to be used for legal purposes (Social Security benefits, life insurance, Veteran’s Administration benefits, etc.). A suggestion is to obtain at least 10 – 15 copies. The charge will be included in the burial costs.
OTHER REMINDERS/INFORMATION

Grief and bereavement can be complicated by a seemingly endless number of tasks. The immediate days following a loved one’s death will be focused on the funeral or memorial services. Afterwards, there are various financial and legal issues that are also required.

Every situation is different, but here are some general guidelines of tasks that may need to be addressed.

- **Employer**: If your loved one was working, you should notify his or her employer and ask about any benefits, such as pension plans, or pay due, including vacation or sick time.
- **Social Security**: Notify your local Social Security office of the death. If your loved one was covered, the spouse or dependents may be eligible for certain benefits.
- **Health Insurer**: Contact the health insurance company or employer regarding terminating coverage for the deceased while continuing coverage for others on the policy.
- **Life Insurance**: Contact the agent or company to ask how to file a claim. Usually, the beneficiary will need to complete claim forms and related paperwork. If the deceased is listed as a beneficiary on any other policy, arrange to have the name removed.
- **Accounts**: Arrange to change any joint bank accounts into your name. Make sure important bills, such as mortgage payments, continue to be paid.
- **Tax return**: Seek the advice of an accountant or tax advisor about filing the deceased tax return for the year of the death.

If your loved one was a veteran, you may be able to get assistance with the funeral, burial plot, or other benefits. For information on benefits, call the Veterans Administration at (800) 827-1000.
GRIEF THERAPY AND SUPPORT GROUPS

No matter how loving and supportive one’s family members and friends may be, there are many in grief who may desire or require additional support. Those who travel the path of grief can be helped immensely through various support groups. There are support groups locally and on the internet to assist you with the grief process over the loss of your loved one.

Bereavement Support Groups
There are many support groups on the Internet, including groups for suicide survivors, loss of a spouse, loss of a parent, loss of a child and loss of a sibling. In sharing your thoughts and feelings with others, expressing your grief or simply reading about and digesting other’s experiences, you may find comfort. Be encouraged to seek out grief support groups or bereavement support groups in your area or on the Internet.

One of the resources available free of charge in the New Orleans Metropolitan area is the Grief Resource Center through Canon Hospice, sponsored by the Akula Foundation. They can be reached by calling (504) 723-3628 or (504) 881-0452.

Our staff is truly sorry for your loss. Please let any staff member know how we can serve you better during your time of need.
IMPORTANT TELEPHONE NUMBERS AND SERVICES

UMCNO
Main Switchboard ............................ (504) 702-3000
Orleans Parish Coroner’s Office ............. (504) 658-9660
Pastoral Care ..................................... (504) 702-3064
Social Services/Case Management .......... (504) 702-3500
Medical Records Requests .................... (504) 702-2079
Patient Experience ............................. (504) 702-3600
Hospital Public Safety (for valuables) ....... (504) 702-3108
Release of Information ........................ (504) 702-2082

Coroner’s Offices
Orleans Parish Coroner’s Office ............. (504) 658-9660
Jefferson Parish Coroner’s Office .......... (504) 365-9100
St. Tammany Parish Coroner’s Office ....... (985) 781-1150

Grief and Trauma Support Services/Groups
Children’s Bureau of New Orleans .......... (504) 525-2366
Compassionate Friends ........................ (877) 969-0010
NO/AIDS Task Force ............................ (504) 821-2601
(For survivors of those who have died of AIDS)
Akula Foundation Grief Resource Center ... (504) 723-3628

Other Resources
Veterans Administration Benefits ............ (800) 827-1000
On the Web ..................................... www.webhealing.org
................................................. www.griefnet.org

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