

September 5, 2013

Re: Doctor Refusal Process

Dear Funeral Home Partners,

On August 2, 2012, the revision of Arizona Revised Statute 36-325 went into effect. It clarified and established which health care provider can certify a death certificate within Arizona and their responsibilities and requirements regarding the process. This legislative change has had a positive impact on both the quality of reporting and timeliness of the death registration process and we thank all parties for their hard work in making this possible.

Our office is writing you today for your assistance. We are still experiencing resistance from some community certifiers resulting in a preventable delayed permit issuance and registration process as well as undue stress on all partners involved; the Office of the Medical Examiner (OME), the Office of Vital Registration (OVR), funeral home partners and family members.

Specifically, we bring to your attention the matter of gathering complete information when the certifier is a community physician. As you are aware, in order for a death certificate to be certified and completed with minimal complications, we ask that the responsible funeral home gathers as much information as possible from the next of kin regarding the decedent's primary care physician or specialists who provided care. This may include gathering information regarding recent medications prescribed and who prescribed the medications. OVR and the OME have found this useful when needing to locate and educate community physicians about their responsibilities for medical certification.

We appreciate that these steps require time and patience and our limited staff are willing to assist you once you have exhausted all your resources gathering this information. If you require additional help with this data gathering, make sure to provide OVR information regarding the community physicians you have attempted to contact, their contact information, why they are refusing to sign and the representatives you spoke with regarding the case. If this information is not documented and provided by your office, OVR will not be able to assist you.

Additionally, we see funeral home partners refer cases to the OME for assistance when community physicians have refused to certify a cause of death. A certifier refusing to complete medical certification does not fall under the jurisdiction of the OME nor is it the primary responsibility of the OME or OVR to locate and pursue a community certifier for medical certification. Although it may be appropriate to refer the case to the OME, if the case does not fall under OME jurisdiction and declined, the funeral home is still required to pursue a community physician for medical certification.

We thank you for your cooperation and understanding regarding this process. We will do our best to continue to assist you in any way we can, but please take this as an opportunity to educate your funeral home staff and partners about your responsibility to contact a community physician for medical certification.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me at 602-372-2635 or through e-mail at LindseyHall@mail.maricopa.gov.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lindsey M. Hall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lindsey M. Hall
Medical Certification & Disposition Supervisor
Maricopa County Department of Public Health
Office of Vital Registration

CC: Arizona State Board of Funeral Directors and Embalmers
Arizona Department of Health Services, Office of Vital Records
Arizona Funeral, Cemetery and Crematory Association
County Vital Records Offices