



Arizona State Board of Nursing

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An advisory opinion adopted by AZBN is an interpretation of what the law requires. While an advisory opinion is not law, it is more than a recommendation. In other words, an advisory opinion is an official opinion of AZBN regarding the practice of nursing as it relates to the functions of nursing. Facility policies may restrict practice further in their setting and/or require additional expectations related to competency, validation, training, and supervision to assure the safety of their patient population and or decrease risk.

OPINION: DETERMINATION OF DEATH: ROLE OF RN/LPN

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ORIGINATING COMMITTEE: LEGAL LEGISLATIVE

Within the Scope of Practice of RN LPN

ADVISORY OPINION DETERMINATION OF DEATH: ROLE OF RN/LPN

It is within the Scope of Practice for a Registered Nurse (RN) to assess a patient's death.

It is within the Scope of Practice for a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) to perform a focused assessment to determine death.

I. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

- A. Written policies and procedures are maintained by the employer.
- B. An RN or LPN is able to make observations to determine the presence or absence of the following presumptive or conclusive signs of death:
 - The patient is unresponsive, has no respirations, and no pulse.
 - The patient's pupils are fixed and dilated
 - The patient's body temperature indicates hypothermia: skin is cold relative to the patient's baseline skin temperature
 - The patient has generalized cyanosis, and conclusively there is the presence of livor mortis (venous pooling of blood in dependent body parts causing purple discoloration of the skin which does not blanch with pressure. (Taken from North Carolina State Board of Nursing's Pronouncement & Determination of Death).

II. RATIONALE

A Registered Nurse (RN) is able to assess a patient's death and therefore pronounce death based on the assessment skills of the RN and the employer's policies and procedures.

A Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) is able to detect significant changes in the patient's condition and report abnormal findings based on requisite knowledge and competency in accordance with the employer's policies and procedures.

This advisory opinion attempts to clarify the various levels of medical and nursing recognition of the condition of a patient's death. First and foremost, only a licensed physician or a nurse practitioner who has completed education and documentation requirements prescribed by the Arizona State Board of Nursing may actually certify a person's cause of death. According to ARS 36-325 (G), "If a person under the current care of a physician or nurse practitioner for a potentially fatal illness dies of that illness, the physician or nurse practitioner, if available, shall

complete and sign the medical certification of death on a death certificate within seventy-two hours.”

According to ARS 32-1601 (13) (a), the definition of professional nursing includes, “Diagnosing and treating human responses to actual or potential health problems.” By this statute a registered professional nurse has the authority to make an assessment and therefore, a pronouncement of death. A registered nurse's assessment or pronouncement of death does not include the medical certification of death. Additionally, institutional policy may also guide the nurse's role in the assessment of death.

According to ARS 32-1601 (12) (a) an LPN may perform activities under the supervision of a physician or a registered nurse which includes contributing to the assessment of the health status of individuals and groups.

III. REFERENCES

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