



Doug Ducey
Governor

Joey Ridenour
Executive Director

Arizona State Board of Nursing

4747 N. 7th Street, Suite 200
Phoenix, AZ 85014-3655
Phone (602) 771-7800 Fax (602) 771-7888
E-Mail: arizona@azbn.gov
Home Page: <http://www.azbn.gov>

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**OPINION: DETERMINATION OF DEATH:
ROLE OF RN/LPN
APPROVED: 5/94
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ORIGINATING COMMITTEE: LEGAL
LEGISLATIVE**

Within the Scope of Practice of X RN X LPN

ADVISORY OPINION DETERMINATION OF DEATH: ROLE OF RN/LPN

It is within the Scope of Practice of the Registered Nurse (RN) to assess a patient/client death. It is within the Scope of Practice for a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) to gather clinical data (R4-19-401), recognize significant changes, and to report these changes to a Licensed Independent Practitioner (LIP) or RN.

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:
 - Unresponsive, no respirations/pulse
 - Pupils are fixed and dilated
 - Body temperature indicates hypothermia: skin is cold relative to the patient's baseline skin temperature
 - 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).

II. RATIONALE

An RN is able to assess a patient/client death and therefore determine death based on the assessment skills of the RN and the employer policies and procedures.

An LPN is able to gather clinical data, report findings to the LIP/RN, and in accordance with the facility policy, the LPN may accept orders regarding the determination of death.

This advisory opinion attempts to clarify the various levels of medical and nursing recognition of the condition of a patient's/client's death. A LIP or a nurse practitioner who has

completed education and documentation requirements prescribed by the Arizona State Board of Nursing may certify a 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 an RN has the authority to make an assessment and therefore, a determination of death. An RN’s assessment or determinant of death does not include the medical certification of death. 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 an RN which includes contributing to the assessment of the health status of individuals and groups.

III. REFERENCES

Arizona Revised Statutes, 2006; ARS 36-325 (G), ARS 32-1601 (13) (a), ARS 32-1601 (12)

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