



Guidance for Request of Post-mortem Examination

Internal Policy

April 2023

Ministry of Health

P.O. Box 52, Victoria, Mahé

Republic of Seychelles

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About this Policy

Title	Guidance for Request of Postmortem Examination, 2023
Purpose	The purpose of this policy is to outline the specific indications for a postmortem examination in Seychelles and to provide practical guidance for healthcare professionals.
Developed by	Ministry of Health (MOH) Secretariat and Health Care Agency
Lead Implementing Agency	Health Care Agency
Policy Catalogue Reference Number	MOH-2023-GuidanceRequestPostmortem-Final.pdf
Approval Date	24 April 2023
Approval By	Ministry of Health Extended Management Committee
Revision Dates	26 April 2023 – Added Catalogue Reference. 18 May 2023 – Added Annex 3 – Clinical summary form.

Acknowledgements

The development of this policy was undertaken in response to an expressed need from the Health Care Agency, and the process spanned February to April 2023.

The policy development team consisted of:

- Susan Fock-Tave – Chief Medical Officer (CMO)
- Agnes Chetty – Director General for Policy and Planning
- Telma Rose – Technical Advisor to CMO
- Naidy Rojo Quintero – Acting Consultant-in-Charge (CIC), Pathology
- Marcus Belle – Pathologist
- Joanne Michel – Director Clinical Laboratory
- Sanjeev Pugazhendhi – Policy Analyst

Inputs were sought from the following stakeholders:

- Danny Louange – Chief Executive Officer of HCA
- Josapha Jouanneau – Principal Medical Officer for Community Health
- Mazhar Afaq – Principal Medical Officer for Seychelles Hospital
- Pathology team, including Forensic Pathologist (through CIC)
- Ruby Simeon – Legal Advisor, MOH

1 Purpose

Postmortem examination refers to the dissection, external and internal examination of a dead body to determine the cause of death¹. Blood, urine or tissue samples or body organs may also be removed for further analysis including histological, microbiological and toxicology investigations.

The aim of postmortem examination is to inform relatives, healthcare professionals and other interested parties about the cause of death in instances where a definite cause cannot be immediately provided. Postmortem examination also adds to overall understanding of disease and can help improve the quality of medical care for other similar patients.

The purpose of this policy is to outline the specific instances indicated for a postmortem examination in Seychelles and to provide practical guidance for health care professionals.

1.1 Scope

This policy applies to all health care workers of Seychelles.

1.2 Definitions

Cause of death: includes not only the apparent cause of death as ascertainable by inspection or examination of the body but all matters necessary to enable an opinion to be formed as to the manner in which the deceased person died.

Death: The permanent disappearance of all evidence of life in a person at any time after the person's birth.

Forensic pathologist: A medical practitioner who has specialized training, experience or academic qualifications in the field of pathology and who specifically investigates non-natural or suspicious deaths.

Inquest: A legal investigation into the cause and circumstances of death of a person.

Medical certificate of cause of death: Certificate issued by a medical practitioner listing cause of death of a person.

Medical practitioner: A person registered as a medical practitioner under the Medical Practitioners and Dentists Act, 1994 Cap. 126.

¹ Collins (2023): Definition of postmortem examination, Collins English Dictionary, [Online] Available at [Postmortem examination definition and meaning | Collins English Dictionary \(collinsdictionary.com\)](https://www.collinsdictionary.com/en/definition/postmortem-examination), Accessed 15/02/2023

Medical treatment or care: Includes any operation or any surgical, diagnostic or therapeutic procedure.

Notification of death: Form issued by a medical practitioner informing the date, location and time of death of a person.

Pathologist: A medical practitioner who has specialized training, experience or academic qualifications in the field of pathology.

Autopsy^{2,3}: Consists on the dissection and examination of a dead body and its organs and structures to establish a final diagnosis, relate the cause of death to the associated pathologies and explain the interaction between the two.

Synonyms: necropsy, postmortem, postmortem examination.

Clinical Autopsy⁴: is carried out with the consent of the deceased's next of kin in order to find and/or better understand the causes of death.

Synonyms: Hospital Autopsy, Pathological Autopsy, Non Coronial Autopsy, Clinical Postmortem, Hospital Postmortem

Medico-legal Autopsy⁵: is performed with the aim of help the law enforcement agencies to ascertain the identity of the deceased, cause of death, type of weapon used, Time since death, manner of death and to collect any trace evidence.

Synonyms: Forensic Autopsies, Coroner's Autopsy, Coronial Autopsy, Medico Legal Postmortem

² Goyal N, Garg A. Medicolegal Autopsy [Internet]. Autopsy - What Do We Learn from Corpses? IntechOpen; 2022. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.103039>

³ Costache, M., Lazaroiu, A. M., Contolenco, A., Costache, D., George, S., Sajin, M., & Patrascu, O. M. (2014). Clinical or postmortem? The importance of the autopsy; a retrospective study. *Maedica*, 9(3), 261–265. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4305994/>

⁴ Kotabagi, R. B., Charati, S. C., & Jayachandar, D. (2005). Clinical Autopsy vs Medicolegal Autopsy. *Medical journal, Armed Forces India*, 61(3), 258–263. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0377-1237\(05\)80169-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0377-1237(05)80169-8)

⁵ Menezes RG, Monteiro FN. Forensic Autopsy. [Updated 2022 Sep 5]. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2023 Jan-. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK539901/>

2 Laws and Regulations for Declaration of Death

2.1 Notification of Death

As per the **Civil Status (Amendment Act) 2021** and **Inquest into Death Act 2021** the body of a deceased person or the remains of a body shall be examined by a medical practitioner, pathologist or forensic pathologist. A medical practitioner who was in attendance before the death and until the death of a deceased person shall give a notification of death to the Chief Officer of the Civil Status, the Principal Secretary of Health and designated family member within 24 hours of a confirmation of death. The designated family member may be the nearest surviving relative of the deceased person or the executor of the estate of the deceased person.

2.2 Medical Certificate of Cause of Death

The medical practitioner who was in attendance before the death and until the death of a deceased person shall submit a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death to the Chief Officer of Civil Status and the Commissioner of Public Health. If the death qualifies for an inquest or if the medical practitioner is of the opinion that the death is of suspicious circumstances, the medical practitioner shall not submit the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death. For deaths occurring outside healthcare settings, guidance is as per the Civil Status Act, 2021 (Part V)⁶.

2.3 Death Qualifying for Inquest or Death Under Suspicious Circumstances

In the event that the death qualifies for an inquest or if the medical practitioner is of the opinion that the death is of suspicious circumstances, the medical practitioner, pathologist or forensic pathologist shall as soon as reasonably practicable submit a medical report to the Commissioner of Police highlighting any medical observations made during the examination of the deceased.

The Commissioner of Police shall submit the medical report together with a police report in relation to the deceased person to the Attorney General and a Magistrate or any person empowered to hold an inquest under the Inquest into Death Act 2021, or any other written Law.

⁶ Government of Seychelles: Civil Status Act, 2021 (Act 24 of 2021), accessed 27 Mar 2023, at: <https://seylit.org/akn/sc/act/1883/4/eng%402021-07-01#>

3 Policy Statements

- The Ministry of Health recognizes the importance of postmortem examinations in giving relatives, clinicians and legal authorities more information about the cause of death
- The Ministry of Health will ensure that that consent for postmortem examination on adults, children and babies is taken in a dignified and sensitive manner by relevant staff from informed relatives.
- This policy outlines the procedures to be followed when approaching relatives for consent for a Hospital Postmortem for adults, children or babies ensuring that consent is both informed and freely given.
- Medical practitioners will ensure proper documentation of procedures
- Procedures for postmortems required by law are under the remit of the Ministry of Internal Affairs

4 Indications for Postmortem Examination

Indication for postmortem examination falls under two categories: court-ordered postmortem (when required by law) and hospital postmortem.

1. **Postmortem examination required by law** (See Schedules I & II below)
 - Postmortem examinations required by law do not require the consent of relatives of the deceased person. Relatives, however, need to be informed.
2. **Hospital postmortem examination**
 - Hospital postmortem examination describes all postmortems that are not required by law and where the consent of relatives is required.
 - They can be requested by relatives of the deceased person or by the medical practitioner who was in attendance before the death and until the death, to find out more information about the cause of death.
 - Full consent of the nearest surviving relative of the deceased person or the executor of the estate of the deceased person is required.

4.1 Postmortem Examinations Required by Law

In a case of death reported to a magistrate under section 9 of the Inquest into Death Act 2021⁷, the Magistrate may, after consulting a forensic pathologist, pathologist or an approved medical practitioner, order a postmortem examination to be conducted if the Magistrate is of the opinion that a postmortem is necessary to establish the manner and cause of death.

A Magistrate shall also order a postmortem examination to be conducted if the Attorney General makes an application for an inquest to be held. With reference to the Inquest into Death Act (2021), Schedule I lists the different types of deaths qualifying for inquest whilst Schedule II specifies the deaths for which inquest shall be held.

Procedures for inquest and postmortems required by law are under the remit of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

⁷ Government of Seychelles: Inquest into Death Act, 2021 (Act 47 of 2021), accessed on 27 Mar 2023, at <https://www.gazette.sc/sites/default/files/2021-11/Act%2047%20-%20Inquest%20into%20Death%20Act%202021.pdf>

Schedule I: Deaths Qualifying for Inquest

1. Death in Seychelles of a person whose identity is not known
2. Any death in Seychelles that was unnatural or violent
3. Any death in Seychelles that resulted or is suspected to have resulted, directly or indirectly, from an accident
4. Any death in Seychelles that occurred, directly or indirectly, as a result of any medical treatment or care
5. Death in Seychelles of a person where the person was, before the person's death, in official custody and where the death was related, or suspected to be related, to that custody.
6. Any death in Seychelles occurring apparently, or possibly as a consequence of, any law enforcement operation.
7. Any death in Seychelles involving a public vehicle, commercial transport vehicle or other mode of public transport
8. Any death of a person in possession of an immigration permit
9. Any death on board a Seychelles-registered vessel or a Seychelles-registered aircraft
10. Upon the authority of the Attorney General to hold an inquest, a death occurring outside Seychelles on or from an aircraft or a vessel, not being a Seychelles-registered vessel or a Seychelles-registered aircraft
11. Any death in Seychelles that was caused or suspected to have been caused by an unlawful act or omission
12. Any death in Seychelles the manner or cause of which is unknown
13. Any death in Seychelles that occurred under suspicious circumstances

Schedule II: Deaths for which Inquest shall be held

1. Death in Seychelles of a person whose identity is not known
2. Death in Seychelles of a person where the person was, before the person's death, in official custody and where the death was related, or suspected to be related, to that custody
3. Any death in Seychelles occurring apparently or possibly as a consequence of any law enforcement operation
4. Any death in Seychelles that was caused or suspected to have been caused by an unlawful act or omission
5. Any death in Seychelles the manner or cause of which is unknown

4.2 Hospital Postmortem Examination

Beyond legally prescribed indications, a number of other indications warrant a postmortem examination. These examinations can only be conducted with the informed consent of the next of kin.

The **Civil Status (Medical Certification of Cause of Death) regulations, 2022** obligates medical practitioners of Seychelles to provide detailed information on diseases and underlying factors leading to death. In a case of death for which the medical practitioner, who was in attendance before the death and until the death of a deceased person, is unable to provide a concise cause of death to the best of his or her medical knowledge, the medical practitioner has a duty to seek further information pertaining to the death.

The medical practitioner shall discuss and obtain consent from the nearest surviving relative of the deceased person or the executor of the estate of the deceased person for a postmortem examination. Table 1 lists other cases which can be indicated for consented postmortem examination.

Table 1 Indications for Hospital Postmortems

<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Death in which due cause has not been established2. Death in which the family expresses concerns or requires reassurance3. Death in which there are significant questions concerning effectiveness of therapy/extent of disease4. Unexpected or unexplained death which has occurred during diagnostic/therapeutic procedures5. All maternal deaths6. All stillbirths7. Death on arrival at the hospital8. Death occurring in the hospital within 24 hours after hospital admission9. Death during surgery and within 48 hours after surgical intervention10. Death in which the deceased sustained or apparently sustained an injury while hospitalized11. Death within 48 hours after being discharged from hospital.12. Any other instances where the treating physician feels a postmortem will improve understanding of the cause of death

Source: Adapted from Indications for autopsy (UC Davis Health System Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine)⁸

⁸Indications for autopsy by the UC Davis Health System Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine, [Online] Available at [Indications for Autopsy | UC Davis Health Department of Pathology](#), Accessed 15/02/2023

5 Roles and Responsibilities of Medical Practitioners

5.1 Communication

The postmortem examination should be discussed with sensitivity, openness and with all necessary information to enable families to make decisions. Specific information to be provided to families include:

- Reason why the postmortem examination is being proposed
- Basic explanation of what happens during a postmortem examination, including the taking of tissue samples for further analysis.
- Timing and estimated duration of the postmortem examination

Information should be provided on an individual basis. Some families will need detailed explanations on postmortem examination whilst other families will prefer just general information. If the family is satisfied that they have enough information to make a decision, the family should have the option to decline detailed information.

- Health professionals should communicate with the family of the deceased in a language and manner that they can understand.
- All communications should take place in an appropriate environment, which respects the privacy of the family and dignity of the deceased person.
- All communications should be sensitive to belief, culture and religious values of the family of the deceased.
- Families should be provided with:
 - Honest, clear and accurate information
 - Reasonable time to receive information and make decisions
 - Privacy for discussion
 - Factual information (i.e. leaflets/booklets)
 - Additional support they may require (e.g. access to interpreter including sign language interpreters, emotional and psychological support)
- Families should be encouraged to ask any question(s) they wish, and discuss with other family members before taking a final decision.

5.2 Consent

A hospital postmortem examination is not a mandatory procedure; families have the right to give or refuse permission.

Who may give consent:

- For an adult, the next of kin.

- For a child, consent may be given by those with parental responsibility (It is good practice to involve both parents if at all possible, and where there is joint responsibility neither parent should act independently of the other).
- For stillbirths, consent must be obtained from the mother.

A medical practitioner who was in attendance before the death and until the death of a deceased person is responsible for obtaining consent for the postmortem examination from the nearest surviving relative of the deceased person or the executor of the estate of the deceased person.

The medical practitioner will explain the reasons for requesting a postmortem and provide necessary information.

Documentation of consent (or refusal thereof) is required in writing.

The pathologist or forensic pathologist must review and sign the consent form before the start of the postmortem examination.

5.3 Reporting Postmortem Results

The medical practitioner who was in attendance before the death and until the death of a deceased person and who obtained consent for the postmortem examination should organize a meeting with the family of the deceased, when the postmortem report is available. As far as possible, the medical practitioner and pathologist/forensic pathologist should discuss the findings of the postmortem with the family.

5.4 Documentation

Accurate records of all discussions held between the family of the deceased and any member of the healthcare team should be recorded in the healthcare record of the deceased.

A copy of the consent and postmortem reports should be included in the patient medical records. Clear documentation of biological samples taken, tests requested, any results, and photographs or other imaging conducted postmortem, should be included in the postmortem report.

Information provided to the family of the deceased should also be documented.

6 Annexes

6.1 Information Sheet: Postmortem Examination

This information sheet explains why you are being asked to give your consent to a postmortem examination of your loved one and explains the procedure we will follow.

We would like to express our deepest sympathy to you and your family following the passing of your loved one. We understand that this is a difficult time for you and that you may find it hard to fully understand what is being said and to ask questions. This information sheet contains information about the postmortem procedure and how the findings of the examination will be conveyed to you afterwards.

We hope that this will help you to understand the reasons for the examination and why we need to ask you to complete a form to consent to the procedure. You can choose how much information you want to receive but we need to emphasize that

- This postmortem examination will only be carried out if you are in agreement
- You can ask as many questions as you like
- You can take a break from filling in the consent form and discuss with other family members before returning the form to us

What is a postmortem examination?

Postmortem examination, also known as autopsy, is a detailed examination of a body after death. Postmortem examination is carried out by a pathologist, who is a trained medical doctor who specializes in the detection and confirmation of disease after death and identify the causes of death.

There are two types of postmortem examination. Court-ordered postmortem is an examination required by law and does not require the consent of the family. Hospital postmortem, on the other hand, is an examination requested by yourself or by the medical doctor(s) who attended to your loved one prior to death, to find out more information about the cause of death. Hospital postmortem can only be done with your permission.

Why are postmortems carried out?

The main purpose of postmortem examination is to determine how and why your loved one has died. Death can occur in patients who may or may not have a pre-existing medical conditions or who may or may not be enrolled in a medical treatment. In all of these cases, doctors are sometimes unable to provide the exact reason for the death.

For the deceased person who had pre-existing medical conditions, a postmortem examination serves as a way to better understand the progression of the disease and the events leading to death. For the deceased person with no apparent medical problem, the postmortem can help uncover any underlying problem. In both cases, the findings of the postmortem may help the surviving family members and other patients in the future.

When and where will the postmortem examination take place?

The examination usually take place as soon as possible after the death of a person at the Mortuary Unit of the Seychelles Hospital. We will advise you when the examination will take place. From time to time, medical students, student nurses and police officers (for medico-legal autopsies) may view postmortem examination as part of their training.

How will the postmortem examination be carried out?

The examination will be carried out according to best practice guidelines and professional standards, with great care and respect for the body of your loved one. The pathologist will start the postmortem by carefully examining the outside or external part of the body. The pathologist will then open the body and examined the internal surfaces in detail.

In some cases, the cause of death is not immediately obvious and a diagnosis can only be made by retaining small tissue samples of relevant organs for detailed examination. Some of the tissue sample will be stored in preserving solution or wax. The remaining tissue samples will be chemically treated in order to create blocks and slides, which will be viewed under a microscope.

These samples will be stored at the Pathology Laboratory for a specified period after the postmortem, for records. Thereafter the samples will be discarded at the Hospital incinerator.

Body fluids (for example, blood and urine) will sometimes be collected for additional laboratory testing (for example biochemical analysis). These body fluid samples will be disposed of after we have received all results of the postmortem examination.

Internal body organs are removed from the body during the postmortem examination so that they can be better examined to identify any abnormality. The organs will be returned to the body prior to the burial or cremation.

Photographs of the body or parts thereof may be required as part of medical documentation during the postmortem. Certain forms of imaging may also be used as additional investigations and/or records (such as X-rays).

The body undergoes natural changes after death which are not connected with the postmortem examination. The postmortem will be carried out with great care to maintain the external appearance of your loved one as much as possible.

What will happen after the postmortem examination is completed?

When the postmortem examination is completed, a report is prepared. The treating doctor and/or pathologist conducting the postmortem will invite you to a meeting to discuss the findings of the postmortem examination. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to talk to the medical doctor who attended to your loved one prior to death or any member of our health care staff.

6.2 Consent Form for Postmortem Examination

Instruction: Read the information sheet on Postmortem Examination Procedure", discuss with the attending medical practitioner, and, in each section below, tick the relevant box(es) to indicate your decisions.

Part 1 Details of Person who Died

Name(s):	DOB (DD/MM/YYYY):
	Date of Death:
Surname:	Residential address:
	NIN:
Reported Place of Death:	Certifying/Attending Doctor(s):

Part 2 Consent for Postmortem Examination

Please acknowledge the following (all compulsory prior to consent).

<input type="checkbox"/>	I confirm that I have been given the "Information Sheet: Postmortem Examination Procedure".
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<input type="checkbox"/>	I confirm that my questions about the postmortem examination have been answered to my satisfaction and understanding.
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Please choose **one** of following options to indicate whether you consent to a postmortem

<input type="checkbox"/>	I consent to a postmortem examination of the person named above, with required additional investigations such as tissue sampling and imaging.
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<input type="checkbox"/>	I do not consent to a postmortem examination of the person named above
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Consenting Person: I confirm that my consent decisions and wishes are indicated by boxes ticked above.

Full Name:	Relationship to Deceased:	
NIN:	DOB:	Address:
Signature:	Telephone:	
	Date:	

Attending medical practitioner(s): I have explained the contents of the information sheet on postmortem examination and I believe the next-of-kin has sufficient understanding of the postmortem.

Full Name of Medical practitioner:	Post title:
Signature:	Date:
	SMDC Reg #:

Interpreter statement (if applicable): I have interpreted the information about the postmortem for the next-of-kin to the best of my ability and I believe they understand it.

Name:	Position/Relationship:
Signature:	Languages (from → to):

Pathologist conducting postmortem: I confirm I have received and verified the consent form and contents.

Full Name:	Post title:
Signature:	Date:
	SMDC Reg #:

6.3 Clinical summary form

HEALTH CARE AGENCY

Clinical summary of events leading to death

This form is to be filled as part of a request for post-mortem, and should be sent to the Pathology Laboratory, with the patient's notes and signed consent form.

Full Name			
Date of Birth (DD/MM/YY)		Occupation	
NIN (XXX-XXXX-X-X-XX)			Sex (M/F)
Date/Time of Admission (DD/MM/YY)		Ward / Unit/ Health Centre	
Summary of clinical features and investigation findings:			
Likely cause of death based on clinical findings			Approximate time interval between onset and death
a)			
b)			
c)			
d)			
Other significant conditions leading to death but not resulting in the above underlying causes:			
Date/Time of death (DD/MM/YYYY)/ (HH:MM)		Would you like to attend the autopsy? (Y/N)	
Reason for requesting post-mortem			
Requesting Clinician Name			
Signature		Date (DD/MM/YY)	