



Family Communication and Management at Health Care Facilities (HCFs)

Each HCF should identify internal staff and processes for managing family needs, answering family inquiries, and maintaining communication as needed. It should be noted that family management and communication is not a responsibility that every staff member may need to be able to perform. **Each HCF should evaluate who among their staff is best suited to speak with grieving families.** Additionally, speaking with families should not be done without proper training and understanding of hospital and OCME policies.

Compassionate and transparent communication with families is especially important as social distancing requirements will likely prevent hospital visitors and family members from being present at the time of death or possibly even being informed of their loved one's illness or injury prior to their passing. It is recommended that a dedicated family management phone line be established. **Please note that the following steps apply to all NON medical examiner cases. All cases that fall under OCME jurisdiction will be taken into OCME custody per standard protocol.**

Once a patient dies, the HCF should:

1. Make a notification of death to the decedent's family / Next of Kin (NOK)
2. Verify current contact information for the decedent's family / NOK
3. Communicate with the decedent's family / NOK to understand and document the intentions for final disposition, if available. Final disposition can be organized by either:
 - a. Private services, with the hiring of a funeral home
 - b. Electing for and authorizing city burial
4. Provide the decedent's family with a general overview regarding the process for decedent storage and release both at the hospital, and **in the event their loved one needs to be transferred to OCME**

If a family intends to make private arrangements:

- If arrangements are made, the decedent can be released on demand from the hospital.
- It should be clearly communicated to the family that if they *cannot* make immediate private arrangements, OCME may take custody of their loved one and provide temporary storage until arrangements can be made.
 - Once OCME takes custody, families should be encouraged to contact both their funeral director and OCME for disposition status updates.
 - **Families should also be assured that OCME will take the utmost care and respect when taking custody of their loved one** and will coordinate release of their loved one from OCME's storage facility, upon the funeral director's request.

If a family is unsure about private arrangements and/or needs additional time or resources:

- It should be clearly communicated to the family that if they cannot make immediate private arrangements, OCME will take custody of their loved one for temporary storage.
 - If family is requesting burial in City Cemetery, communicate this request to OCME and inform family that this will occur once the case is transferred to OCME.
- Families who are uncertain about their ability or intent to make private arrangements should be advised to **contact the OCME Outreach Unit at (212) 447-2030 for further assistance and information on burial resources.**

If family/NOK is unknown:

- The hospital must follow protocol to report the case to the Public Administrator.

How can the family get the personal effects of their loved one?

- The hospital should communicate with the family to coordinate appropriate release of all decedent's personal effects in hospital custody. OCME will not take custody of personal effects of any decedent.

Upon taking custody of decedents from a hospital, OCME will do the following:

- Communicate with the known family and the chosen funeral home to affect case release for final disposition.
- If family is not identified (or unavailable) OCME will conduct a due diligence search to locate and notify NOK.

If an answer to a question a family member is making is unknown, please tell them that you are not sure and will get an answer to their question. After getting off the phone with them, follow up with the appropriate parties to get an answer.