



EXCEPTIONAL CARE. WITHOUT EXCEPTION.

# Bereavement Guide

Boston Medical Center  
Decedent Affairs Office

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EXCEPTIONAL CARE. WITHOUT EXCEPTION.

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[www.bmc.org](http://www.bmc.org)

Dear Family and Friends,

The staff of Boston Medical Center (BMC) is here to help you cope with the loss of your loved one. We offer assistance every step of the way to answer any questions about what to do after your loved one has passed away. We assure you that we will make every effort to find the support you need during this time while being sensitive to your cultural or religious needs.

We hope the information within these pages helps you during this difficult time.

If you feel you need immediate assistance, please contact the Decedent Affairs Office at 617-638-5788.

Most Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa O'Connor", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Lisa O'Connor RN, BSN, MS, NEA-BC  
Robert Wood Johnson Executive Nurse Fellow  
Sr. Vice President of Clinical Operations & CNO

BOSTON UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER

Boston Medical Center  
Boston University School of Medicine  
Boston University School of Public Health  
Boston University Henry M. Goldman School of Dental Medicine



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## **Decedent Affairs Office**

The Decedent Affairs Office (DAO) serves families as a liaison among the medical staff, funeral home, and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

- ❖ The DAO is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- ❖ The DAO helps families understand the paperwork associated with a death and explains and secures permission for the completion of an autopsy.
- ❖ When you call the DAO, please have available:
  - \* The deceased's name
  - \* The location of their death (building, room #)
  - \* Your relationship to the deceased (i.e., mother, sister)
  - \* The deceased's date of birth
  - \* Any questions you have written down in advance

If you have any questions about paperwork, forms, funeral homes, autopsies, or the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, feel free to call the DAO at 617-638-5788.

## **Checklist for Arrangements**

When your loved one passes away at BMC your family and doctors will be notified and you will be asked if you would like to come to the hospital to see your loved one. We will make every effort to honor your request for visitation; however, we may need to transport the patient to the hospital mortuary prior to this. Once you have made arrangements with a funeral home, a member of its staff will proceed to the hospital to bring your loved one to their facility.

- ❖ Contact other family members, close friends, clergy, the deceased's employer, family employer, and the children's school.
- ❖ Have family and close friends help you make and answer phone calls.
- ❖ Gather together personal information about the deceased to take to the funeral home.
- ❖ Contact life insurance companies, social security, creditors, credit card companies, the bank, and your attorney.

For a more detailed list of information to take with you to the funeral home, have your nurse print the Checklist page from the BMC intranet, or contact the Decedent Affairs Office at 617-638-5788.

## When a Baby Dies

BMC has pastoral care and social work services available 24 hours a day to assist you in this most difficult time. Please ask your nurse to contact them or call the Decedent Affairs Office at 617-638-5788.

- ❖ If your baby passes away, the nursing staff will create a Memory Box containing photos, footprints and a lock of hair for this keepsake. Please ask your nurse about how to receive your Memory Box.
  
- ❖ There are two options under Massachusetts State Law for your baby's disposition:
  - \* Option 1: The baby's family makes arrangements with a funeral home for burial or cremation.
  
  - \* Option 2: The mother or father asks BMC to bury or cremate the baby's remains. BMC is not able to provide the ashes to the family after cremation. If the baby is buried by BMC, the gravesite will be recorded but unmarked.
  
- ❖ To obtain a Certificate of Birth Resulting in Stillbirth (BRS), contact:
  - State Registry of Vital Records and Statistics
  - Attn: CBRS Registrar
  - 150 Mt. Vernon Street
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Floor
  - Dorchester, MA 02125
  - 617-740-2606

## **Counseling and Grief Support**

Everyone experiences grief differently, and grief varies by what the relationship was between the grieving and the deceased. Boston Medical Center (BMC) offers a variety of religious and spiritual support, as well as counseling to its patients and their families. Within that framework is grief support provided by psychiatric nurses in the Emergency Department, social workers, and pastoral care representing a range of religious denominations. Please do not hesitate to request support at any time during this difficult process.

- ❖ The BMC Pastoral Care Service offers support for all faiths and spiritual needs. Services are available 24 hours a day. If you would like pastoral care, please call or visit  
<http://www.bmc.org/pastoralcare/contactachaplain.htm>  
Newton Pavilion: 617-638-6850  
Menino Pavilion: 617-414-5336  
617-414-7560
- ❖ Social workers provide counseling and support for patients and their families. To contact a social worker, please call 617-414-5442 (daytime), or 617-638-5795 #3119 (nights and weekends) or visit [www.bmc.org/socialwork.htm](http://www.bmc.org/socialwork.htm).
- ❖ Religious or spiritual support can also be received from places of worship outside of BMC.
- ❖ If you have a child who needs help understanding death, please call the Good Grief Program at 617-414-4005 for information to help the child understand and cope with the loss.

The Decedent Affairs Office has compiled a list of books and websites providing grief support titled, "Recommended Reading and Support" found on the next page.

For a complete list of grief resources, websites and related organizations, please ask your nurse to print a copy from the BMC intranet, or call the Decedent Affairs Office at 617-638-5788.

## Recommended Reading & Support

There are many different kinds of sorrow within the scope of grief. These books and websites may offer the help you need.

### BOOKS:

- \* Death and the Life After, by Billy Graham
- \* Grief, Comfort for Those Who Grieve and Those Who Want to Help, by Haddon Robinson
- \* How to Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies, by Therese A. Rando
- \* I'm Grieving As Fast As I Can, by Linda Scones Feinberg
- \* Living When a Loved One Has Died, by Earl A. Grollman
- \* Recovering From the Loss of a Child, by Katherine Fair Donnelly
- \* Talking with Children about Death, by Maria Trozzi
- \* The Grieving Child, by Helen Fitzgerald
- \* Why do Bad Things Happen to Good People, by Melvin Tinker
- \* Water Bugs and Dragonflies, by Doris Stickney
- \* Gone from My Sight, by Barbara Karnes

### WEB SITES:

- \* Center for Loss & Life Transition- [www.centerforloss.com](http://www.centerforloss.com)
- \* The Compassionate Friends- [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)
- \* Grief Recovery Institute- [www.grief](http://www.grief)
- \* The Dougy Center- [www.dougy.org](http://www.dougy.org)
- \* National Center for Death Education- [www.mountida.edu/ncde](http://www.mountida.edu/ncde)
- \* CIRCLE- [www.bostonchildhealth.org/pediatricsdept/goodgrief/circle.html](http://www.bostonchildhealth.org/pediatricsdept/goodgrief/circle.html)
- \* Massachusetts Funeral Directors Association [http://www.griefwords.com/library/active/massfda\\_org.asp](http://www.griefwords.com/library/active/massfda_org.asp)
- \* Hospice Foundation of America- <http://www.hospicefoundation.org/grief>
- \* Grief, a Muslim Perspective- <http://www.hospicefoundation.org/uploads/1998raad.pdf>
- \* Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center- <http://isbcc.org/al-marhama/>

## **Valuables & Personal Belongings**

Boston Medical Center provides a secured location for patient valuables during their stay.

To collect your deceased family member's valuables, contact the security office at 617-414-4444. Photo identification and the valuables voucher will be required to claim these items.

- ❖ There are two kinds of personal property:
  - \* Personal effects, including dentures, glasses, clothing, hearing aids, etc.
  - \* Valuables, including jewelry, cash, wallets, cell phones, laptops, etc.
  
- ❖ Valuables are inventoried when the patient is admitted and then locked in a secure location which requires two keys to open, similar to safe deposit boxes.
  
- ❖ Notes of the patient's belongings and the Valuables Voucher are also recorded in the patient's medical record when they are admitted.
  
- ❖ In some instances, clothing or personal belongings may be disposed of because they are too soiled to be safely cleaned or laundered.

# Autopsy

An autopsy **cannot** be performed unless authorized by the deceased's next-of-kin. In certain circumstances the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner may require an autopsy. An autopsy is a medical and scientific procedure intended to establish the cause of death and to determine the medical and scientific reasons for death. Each autopsy contributes to the knowledge and understanding of medicine and may benefit persons still alive. Thus, an autopsy allows someone to contribute to future generations.

- ❖ Legal next-of-kin: When a person dies management of their remains is handled by their next-of-kin. Massachusetts law recognizes the following people, in descending order of priority, to be a person's next-of-kin: Spouse (if not divorced), children, grandchildren, parents, siblings (in agreement). A health care proxy ends when a person dies and the hospital turns to a patient's family for instructions.
- ❖ If an autopsy is requested, the doctor will ask you for written permission to perform one. The doctor will be assisted by an administrator who works with the Decedent Affairs Office. The DAO can answer any questions before completion of the form. Contact the DAO at 617-638-5788.
- ❖ An autopsy is a surgical procedure that requires incisions into the patient's body. It will not affect your loved one having an open casket viewing.
- ❖ To get a copy of the autopsy report, contact Medical Records at 617-414-4201 to request an authorization release form. Return the form with a copy of executorship papers to identify you as the Executor/Executrix of the patient's estate. Medical Records will send you the autopsy report within 30 business days.
- ❖ There is **no charge** to perform an autopsy on a Boston Medical Center patient, and the autopsy is provided free of charge upon request.

## Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) is a state agency whose mission is to determine the cause and manner of death in cases under its jurisdiction, pursuant to Chapter 38 of Massachusetts General Laws. The agency accomplishes this mission through case investigations, internal and external examinations, and laboratory analysis.

- ❖ In the event that the OCME takes jurisdiction of the deceased patient, the hospital no longer has authority over post-mortem care. The body will be transported to OCME at 720 Albany Street for examination. Subsequent funeral arrangements must be made through OCME.
- ❖ *Please be aware that the OCME requires that a family make a visual identification of a loved one prior to release to a funeral home.*
- ❖ The OCME does **not** require permission to perform an autopsy.
- ❖ Viewing a deceased patient at the OCME is held at their discretion. Please contact OCME to request permission.
- ❖ Requests for autopsy reports must be in writing and signed by legal next of kin. There is no charge for this report. Send requests to:

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner  
720 Albany Street  
Boston, MA 02118

Should you have additional questions, please call the OCME at 617-267-6767

## Death Certificates

A death certificate is a legal form the certifying physician, the hospital, and the funeral home complete when someone has died.

- ❖ The physician records the name of the deceased, cause of death, the date and time of death, and his/her name and medical license number.
- ❖ The funeral home completes the death certificate with the address, education, occupation, Social Security number, and the details of the deceased's final resting place.
- ❖ Once filed at Boston City Hall, the death certificate is then called a Certified Copy of Death Certificate and can be obtained by calling Boston City Hall at 617-635-4175, going to Boston City Hall Suite 213, or by mail:  
Boston City Hall  
Suite 213  
1 City Hall Plaza,  
Boston, MA 02201
- ❖ Copies from Boston City Hall cost \$12.00 per copy. Add \$3.00 if ordering by mail.

If you need a letter documenting a death, please call the Decedent Affairs Office at 617-638-5788.

## Funeral Homes

Below is a partial list of local funeral homes used by BMC. For a more detailed list, please consult your phone book. The businesses listed below are not necessarily endorsed by BMC.

Davis Funeral Home 617-427-0828  
89 Walnut Avenue, Roxbury, MA

Faggas Funeral Service 617-926-2163  
553 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown, MA

Floyd Williams Funeral Home 617-436-5592  
490 Columbia Road, Dorchester, MA

Hearn Funeral Home 617-323-4300  
43 Cummins Highway, Roslindale, MA

JB Johnson Funeral Home 617-445-8150  
196 Warren Street, Roxbury, MA

Spencer Funeral Home 617-268-0855  
575 E. Broadway, South Boston, MA

Stanetsky Memorial Chapel 781-581-2300  
10 Vinnin Street, Salem, MA

Tobin & Mitchell Funeral Home 617-536-1000  
666 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, MA

Wing Fook Funeral Home 617-989-8833  
13 Gerard Street, Roxbury, MA

Mayhew Funeral Home 603-279-4007  
204 D.W. Highway, Meredith, NH 03253

Peabody Funeral Home 603-432-2801  
15 Birch Street, Derry, NH 03038

## **Funeral Home Guidelines**

Funeral Homes and Funeral Directors are licensed to perform a variety of functions, including organizing the funeral, supporting the family, and completing necessary paperwork.

- ❖ After you have contacted the funeral home, they will transfer the deceased from BMC to the funeral home.
- ❖ The funeral director will meet with the next of kin to make the funeral arrangements and complete the necessary paperwork.
- ❖ When you meet with the funeral director, the details are made regarding the funeral/religious services, calling hours, burial or cremation of the deceased. Take with you the deceased's full name, social security number, parents' names, occupation, and life insurance policies.
- ❖ The Massachusetts Funeral Directors Association provides information on finding a funeral home in your area. Answers to frequently asked questions can be found on its web site, [www.massfda.org](http://www.massfda.org).

For a more detailed list of what to do after your loved one has died, and what to take with you to the funeral home, see the Checklist for Arrangements page in this brochure or call the Decedent Affairs Office at 617-638-5788.

## **Financial and Government Resources**

Should you find yourself in a situation requiring assistance, financial or otherwise, the following organizations may be able to help. As with most agencies providing assistance, eligibility requirements may vary.

### **State Assistance**

- ❖ Department of Transitional Assistance 1-800-249-2007
  - \* This department of welfare may be able to assist if you have no assets or life insurance and can document need. To fill out an application, visit any local transitional assistance office or call. The offices and phone line are staffed Monday through Friday from 8:45 am to 5:00 pm.
  - \* There are limited resources in Massachusetts to support the burial or cremation of deceased persons. The Department of Transitional Assistance provides a small fee to a funeral director who helps bury or cremate patients with limited recourses.

### **Federal Assistance**

- ❖ Social Security Administration 1-800-772-1213
  - \* Survivor benefits vary; call to check eligibility.
- ❖ Veterans Affairs 1-800-827-1000
  - \* The deceased must have served in the U.S. Military.
  - \* Survivor benefits vary; call to check eligibility.

If you have other questions, please call the Decedent Affairs Office, 617-638-5788.

## **Documents & Paperwork**

Here is a short list of some of the documents that you may encounter:

- ❖ **Certified Copy of Death Certificate**  
See Death Certificate section, page 14
- ❖ **Statement of Goods and Services**  
Contract for services and merchandise relating to the disposition of the deceased by the funeral home
- ❖ **Permission for Autopsy**  
Required by the Decedent Affairs Office to begin an autopsy if required
- ❖ **Release Authorization**  
Signed by the next of kin, it authorizes the funeral home to make the transfer of the deceased.

For more information on any of these forms, please call the Decedent Affairs Office at 617-638-5788.

## Phone Numbers

(Arranged Alphabetically)

### **Boston Medical Center Campus**

CIRCLE (Grief Support).....	617-414-4005
Decedent Affairs Office .....	617 -638-5788
Good Grief Program.....	617-414-4005
Heart to Heart (Grief Program).....	617-414-4005
Hospital Operator.....	617 -638-8000
	617-414-5000
Medical Records.....	617-414-4201
Medical School, Anatomic Gift.....	617-638-4245
Patient Advocate.....	617-414- 4970
Pastoral Care Services	
Newton.....	617-638-6850
Menino.....	617-414-5336
	617-414-7560
Psychiatric Nurse.....	617-414-7612
Public Safety.....	617-414-4444
Social Work.....	617-414-5442
	617-638-6834

### **Off BMC Campus**

Boston Police Department.....	617-343-4250
City Hall Registry Division.....	617-635-4184
Department of Transitional Assistance...	800-249-2007
Office of the Chief Medical Examiner...	617-267-6767
Social Security Administration.....	800-772-1213
Veterans Affairs.....	800-827-1000

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Q: What does it mean to say that a person is dead?**

A: Death may be defined as the termination of life; the cessation of all vital phenomena without capability of resuscitation, either in animals or plants. Localized death is going on at all times and in all parts of the living body. Individual cells and elements are being shed and replaced by new ones; this process is essential to life.

General death takes two forms. The whole body dies, then parts of it die, such as death of the tissues. The entire body dying means the functions of the brain, circulatory and respiratory organs and other systems have completely stopped. When a body dies, it does not all die at the same time. Some tissues take several hours before they stop working.

### **Q: Why does a person die?**

A: There are many reasons why people die. Scientifically, persons die because their bodies stopped working, whether it is from disease, or accident. Religiously, there are other reasons, depending upon your beliefs. Everything in this world has a beginning and an end point. For man, death signals the end point for his time in this world.

### **Q: Could death have been prevented?**

A: BMC's doctors, nurses and staff made every effort to ensure the best quality of care for your loved one during their time at the hospital. The present consensus, both scientific and religious, indicates that death can never be prevented.

### **Q: Could death have been delayed?**

A: One way of looking at this is realizing that from the moment of birth, a person is progressing towards death. It is the only

logical destination of the human life cycle. Prolonging life, or improving the quality of life, is what science and medicine are working toward. Modern medicine has come a long way in curing disease and prolonging life from what would have killed a person 100 years ago, but there is still no cure for dying.

**Q: Does the person feel any pain after death?**

A: No. A body feels no pain after death. The ability to perceive pain is only experienced by the living. The systems that sense pain in the body stop working when a person dies.

**Q: What is an autopsy?**

A: An autopsy is an examination of a person who has died to determine or confirm the cause of the death. It can also determine changes produced by disease.

**Q: What happens to the body after it is buried?**

A: This question has varying answers depending upon pre-burial procedures. The body will decompose eventually, but at different rates. If the body was embalmed before burial, decomposition will take longer than if the body was not embalmed. The body may also decompose slowly if the casket and vault were sealed and not exposed to as many of the earth's natural elements as a wooden casket that is not well protected. Once the body starts to decompose, the tissues break down in varying stages until all that is left is bone.

**Q: How can I respect the dead body?**

A: Touching gently and covering the body demonstrates respect.

**Q: What is Embalming?**

A: Embalming preserves the body for suitable viewing during funeral services.

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