

When a loved one dies

The death of a loved one in an emergency department or urgent care centre can be a tragic event. It is often unexpected and overwhelming. You may experience mixed reactions such as shock, disbelief, confusion, anger, distress and sadness. You may have a delayed reaction until the reality of your loved one's death begins to sink in.

You are not alone.

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

Stay at the hospital for as long as you wish.

Emergency department or urgent care centre staff are here to speak with you, help answer your questions or explain anything you do not understand about what has happened. The hospital staff are able to help you contact immediate family members and/or a support person if you wish.

The hospital may have social workers and pastoral care staff who can provide practical, emotional and spiritual support. If they are unavailable please ask the hospital staff how you may seek assistance in obtaining support.

The doctor will tell you if the death of your loved one has been referred to the Coroners' Court of Victoria (see over the page). This is a legal requirement under some circumstances.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE THE HOSPITAL

Close family members may choose to view the deceased person. Staff prefer only immediate family members to come to the hospital. Please tell hospital staff when you are ready to leave. The deceased person will be cared for until you have made plans with your chosen funeral director.

TISSUE DONATION AFTER DEATH

Your loved one may have indicated their wish to be a tissue donor. The next of kin may be contacted by hospital staff and the Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria

to discuss tissue donation. This usually occurs immediately because living tissue needs to be donated within 12–24 hours and usually takes place at the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine in South Melbourne. For more information visit www.donatelife.gov.au

WHEN YOU GET HOME

When you get home, you may want to contact family, friends and your local religious or spiritual community. It can be helpful to seek company and support at this time.

You will need to contact a funeral director, even if the deceased person has been referred to the Coroner's Office. If you are unsure how to find a funeral director, please ask hospital staff in how they may assist you in finding local services appropriate for your religious and spiritual needs. The funeral director will make suitable arrangements to collect the body from the hospital or Coroner's Office.

You may need to check if a prepaid funeral was organised or if there are special requests regarding the care of the body and the funeral.

Organising a funeral is an important part of grieving, so it is worth spending time to plan the funeral that you and the deceased would want. If you need help, the funeral director can take care of all aspects of the funeral such as ordering flowers, putting notices in the newspaper and handling the legal paperwork for either burial or cremation.

You can contact the Australian Funeral Directors Association on (03) 9859 9966 or www.afda.org.au

GRIEVING

Grief can be a complex process that may affect your thoughts, feelings, behaviour and wellbeing. Each person grieves in his/her own way. It is important to give yourself, your family and your friends enough time to grieve. There is no 'normal' length of time or the 'right' way to grieve.

There are recognised support services and helpful information available to assist you all as you grieve. These can be useful at any time now and into the future.

You can also ask your doctor or local healthcare professional for support in your local area.

SUPPORT SERVICES

The services listed below offer ongoing bereavement support and information for you, your family and your friends.

- Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement Counselling and Support Service (for bereavement support): (03) 9265 2100 or www.grief.org.au
- Compassionate Friends (24 hour grief support): 1300 064 068 or www.compassionatefriendsvictoria.org.au
- Grief Line (telephone or online counselling): 1300 845 745 or www.griefline.org.au
- Kids Helpline (a helpline for people aged between five and 25): 1800 55 1800 or www.kidshelpline.com.au
- Lifeline (24 hour crisis or mental health support): 13 11 14
- Mensline Australia (telephone support for men): 1300 78 99 78 or www.menslineaus.org.au

- Road Trauma Support Team Victoria (counselling for those affected by road incidents): 1300 36 77 97 or www.rtssv.org.au
- Victorian State Coroner's Office (to discuss coronial processes and seek support from a family liaison officer or court network volunteer): 1300 30 95 19 or www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE CORONER?

The Coroner investigates deaths that:

- appear to be unexpected, unnatural or violent
- resulted directly or indirectly from an accident or injury
- occurred during or following medical procedures.

The Coroner requires that the deceased person remains exactly as they were when they died, meaning drips and tubes may still be in place. The Coroner's Court will arrange for the deceased person to be taken to the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (VIFM) in Southbank. You will be asked to formally identify your loved one. Ideally this happens at the hospital, but in some circumstances families may be asked to attend VIFM.

An autopsy may be needed to find out why the person died. It is usually performed within three days of the person's death. You will be contacted by the court and asked about the autopsy. You are able to object to an autopsy. Any questions regarding the procedure should be directed to the Coronial Admissions and Enquiries at the Coroner's Court on 1300 30 95 19.

To receive this publication in an accessible format phone 9096 7770, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email emergencycare.clinicalnetwork@safercare.vic.gov.au

Disclaimer: This health information is for general education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for you.

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