



As a Registered Nurse (RN), can I pronounce and certify death?

RNs can pronounce death but they cannot certify death. There is no legislation in New Brunswick governing the pronouncement of death and because there is no legal requirement, an agency policy can support the pronouncement of death by RNs. RNs do not require a medical order to proceed with the pronouncement of death as it is within the scope of practice of RNs, and is anchored in the following principles:

- RNs have the knowledge, skill, and judgment to assess the presence or absence of vital signs.
- It is appropriate for RNs to perform a final assessment and pronounce death for patients as a natural continuation of compassionate and timely nursing care.

Pronouncement of death is the process of gathering information about a patient’s health status, analyzing that data and making a clinical judgment that life has ceased, by observing and documenting the absence of cardiac and respiratory functions.

Pronouncement of death is a convention used to formalize the occurrence of death and to provide assurance to relatives and the public that appropriate measures are being taken to ensure that individuals are indeed deceased before being treated as such. After pronouncement of death, the RN or designate should inform the family, proceed with notification of the physician and where appropriate, notify the funeral home and/or the Coroner’s Office.

Certification of death means determining the cause of death and signing the death certificate. Certification of death is a legislated function and can only be completed by a medical practitioner or a coroner. As well, the *Coroners Act* specifies that notification of the Coroner is required prior to the release of the body when death is unexpected and when death is unexplainable .

The Nurses Association of New Brunswick (NANB) encourages employers to develop policies that support RNs in pronouncing death. They should also outline the specific circumstances of when the Coroner’s office must be notified.

For more information on the RNs role in the pronouncement of death, contact NANB’s Practice Department at 1-800-442-4417 or by email at nanb@nanb.nb.ca.

References

Nurses Association of New Brunswick (2014). Pronouncement of death: Position Statement. Fredericton: Author.

Hours & Dates

The NANB Office is open Monday to Friday, from 08:30 to 16:30

NANB WILL BE CLOSED		DATES TO REMEMBER	
APRIL 18	Good Friday	MAY 12–18	National Nursing Week
APRIL 21	Easter Monday	MAY 27–28	NANB Board Meeting
MAY 19	Victoria Day	MAY 29	NANB’s 98 th AGM & Invitational Forum
JULY 1	Canada Day		
AUGUST 4	New Brunswick Day		
SEPTEMBER 1	Labour Day		