



## Completion of Death Certificates by Licensees

The Washington Medical Commission (Commission) considers the completion of a patient's death certificate a final act of caring for the patient.

Through WAC 246-490-200, Washington now requires electronic reporting through the (Washington Health and Life Event System) WHALES death registration module to standardize the registration process. Certifiers must use WHALES to register and complete a death record **within 5 days**. For more information about enrolling in WHALES, contact [Death.Registration@doh.wa.gov](mailto:Death.Registration@doh.wa.gov). Please note certifiers must access WHALES through an active Secure Access Washington (SAW) account. For information on SAW, the secure single sign-on application gateway, contact them at <https://SecureAccess.wa.gov>

Additional information about death certification can be found at [WHALES - Washington Health and Life Event System | Washington State Department of Health](#)

In Washington State Coroners and Medical Examiners investigate deaths and conduct postmortem examinations to determine cause and manner of death in unclear, unusual, or traumatic circumstances under RCW 68.50. When a death does not meet criteria for an investigation and postmortem examination, the obligation to complete a death certificate falls upon the treating provider.

While this individual may not have been present at the time of death and the exact cause of death may not be obvious; please consider the completion of a death certificate is based solely upon one's medical opinion, to the best of one's knowledge. The medical opinion would be based upon the patient's medical history, the licensee's knowledge of the patient's health status and medical compliance to issue a probable cause of death.

If you are not the patient's primary care provider and are a covering in that individual's absence, please attempt to access the patient's medical chart that can provide you with the patient's problem list and/or medications to complete the death certificate. Put first:

To assist you further with death certification, the Center for Disease Control has published the following educational materials:

### [Cause of Death Mobile Application](#)

- A quick reference guide for Apple or Android users.

### [Writing the Cause-of-Death Statements Training](#)

- How to complete the death certificate and when to refer cases to the coroner or medical examiner.

For licensees with access to **UpToDate**, a comprehensive guide to death investigations and completion of death certificates is included in the subscription.

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