

SPOKANE COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE

Statement of Policy, Procedure and Practice

Policy Title: ADMONITION OPPOSING AUTOPSY

Policy:

According to Washington State law the Medical Examiner's Office can perform autopsies, even without family consent, in those cases that properly come under the authority of the Medical Examiner's Office. However, if a family is strongly opposed to autopsy for religious, personal, cultural, or other reasons, this fact will be taken into consideration. In rare circumstances the family will be allowed to complete an *Admonition Opposing Autopsy*.

Procedures and Practices:

Since performance of an autopsy, by law, is at the discretion of the Medical Examiner, the Medical Death Investigators will not suggest to surviving next-of-kin that the Medical Examiner's Office has an admonition policy.

- The Medical Examiner Death Investigator will note in the case narrative that "family members are opposed to autopsy," and will carefully detail how the Medical Examiner's Office will be able to reach next-of-kin prior to autopsy. One of the Medical Examiners will contact the appropriate family representative in cases where autopsy is strongly opposed, to discuss the need for autopsy.

In rare cases families will be allowed to complete an *Admonition Opposing Autopsy*.

- In cases that appear to be natural deaths based on investigation and/or medical history and where the Medical Examiner is satisfied with the investigation, and believes there are no unclear circumstances surrounding the death.
- Admonition will never be allowed in cases where the manner is apparent homicide, regardless of the time period between infliction of injury and death.
- Admonition will also be declined when drug or medicine toxicity or chemical poisoning is considered to be the most likely cause of death.
- In some cases of traumatic accidents, admonition may be allowed if there are clear medical records describing injuries, if an external examination only can adequately document injuries, or where there is a sufficiently long time interval such that original injuries can no longer be evaluated at autopsy, due to repair/healing.

- In some other circumstances, according to the judgment of the Medical Examiner responsible for case review.

When the above factors are considered and one of the Medical Examiners has concluded that an *Admonition Opposing Autopsy* may be appropriate, the pathologist or an investigator will contact the family and arrange for the *Admonition* form to be signed.

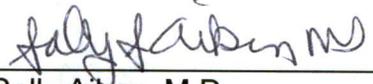
In some deaths, though the family is allowed to sign an admonition, an external examination, blood/urine draws, photographs, blood card, and fingerprints will be completed. Usually families agree to this limited examination, but must be informed. If they decline even this limited examination, it will not be performed.

If, in the opinion of one of the Medical Examiners, an autopsy is still necessary and the family remains opposed, next-of-kin will be instructed to seek legal counsel and are given 24-hours to do so, excluding weekends, and holidays.

- If the Medical Examiner's Office has not received notice of a pending court order within 24-hours of the original phone call to the family, an autopsy will be performed.

References:

RCW 68.50.010 Coroner's (Medical Examiner's) Jurisdiction Over Remains

	<u>9/23/19</u>		<u>9-24-2019</u>
Sally Aiken, M.D.	Date	John D. Howard, M.D.	Date
Medical Examiner		Medical Examiner	

Implemented: April 2003 **Revised:** Feb 2008; Feb 2010; July 2012; Sept 2013; July 2015; March 2017; July 2017; September 2019

Computer File Name: Admonition Opposing Autopsy