

## **CORE CURRICULUM FOR CERTIFIERS OF UNDERLYING CAUSE OF DEATH**

This international curriculum describes minimum requirements for the content of training in certifying causes of death. Its purpose is to provide a basis for education for all countries. Each cluster may be used or not depending on the target to which training is addressed.

### **Knowledge Clusters:**

#### **1 Knowledge of medical science**

*Intent: It is highly recommended that a physician should certify the cause of death. If no physician is available, this cluster may be specifically addressed to provide a basic training for certifying professionals with non-medical background to develop an understanding of the structure and function of the human body and the nature of disease.*

- Anatomy (A study of the structure of the human body utilizing a system approach.)
- Physiology (A study of the functions of the human body.)
- Concept of etiology and risk factors
- Medical terminology (A study of common medical terms related to major disease processes.)
- Pathophysiology (A study of the causes and nature and effects of diseases and the effects of treatment)

#### **2 Knowledge of specific fields or aspects of certification of causes of death**

*Intent: To develop the ability to determine the cause of death.*

- Forensic medicine (A study of medical knowledge used for legal purposes)
- External causes of death (A study of external circumstances that can impair health and their occurrence in the chain of events leading to death)
- Post mortem examination and autopsy (A study of best practice in determining the cause of death)

#### **3 Legal/ethical issues relevant to the country in which certification is being done**

*Intent: To introduce legal and ethical issues applicable to certifying the medical part of a death certificate.*

- Legal requirements regarding death certification (e.g., who is qualified to certify a death, time period within which certification must be made, etc.)
- General privacy and confidentiality principles
  - Adherence to relevant laws and regulations
- Release and dissemination of information
- Completeness of information
- Professional ethics

## 4 General uses of mortality data

*Intent: To explain the purposes for which underlying cause-of-death data are collected and how they are used.*

- Purposes for certifying the medical part of the death record
- Statistical outputs
- Evidence for health policy
- Planning and evaluating health services and programs
- Medical and public health research
- Clinical education

## 5 Specific uses of underlying cause of death data

*Intent: To introduce the specific uses of certified mortality data*

- Health situation and trend analysis
  - Leading causes of death
  - Health indicators
  - Trend analyses
  - Multiple cause of death analysis

## 6 How to certify

*Intent: To provide detailed instruction and experience on how to certify the causes of death on the WHO-recommended death certificate*

- Structure and intent of the death certificate as printed in volume 2 of ICD-10
- Concept of underlying cause of death
- Concept of the sequence of two or more conditions
- Differences between part one and part two of the death certificate
- Certification of specific cases (e.g. maternal mortality, infant mortality and external causes)
- Importance of best medical opinion
- Appropriate exercises in certification

## 7 Quality Assurance

*Intent: To raise awareness about the various factors that influence the quality of certified data.*

- Quality of source information
- Validation of source information
- Responsibility for data quality
- Processes for acquiring additional information (e.g. querying practices, autopsy, police record)

## **RECOMMENDATION FOR “BEST PRACTICE” IN TRAINING CERTIFIERS**

### **Recommendation for best practice**

As the determination of death is a process that some certifiers handle frequently but most certifiers encounter only rarely, some recommendations of best practice for the training of certifiers are provided.

#### **1. Professional background of certifier**

Beyond controversy it is best practice to have medical doctors do the certification of death. Through their training and experience medical doctors will best be able to assign the correct cause of death and sequence of events.

#### **2. Continuous education**

As stated above most certifiers do certify infrequently. Therefore education on certification needs to be brushed up on every once in a while. Education should start in medical school but continue as long as the physician practices. This could be done through different approaches (see below) and should focus on the clusters “use of data” and “how to certify” to remind the physician of the importance of the certification process. Other clusters, like legal and ethical aspects, may change in country specific context over the years. Additional training should be provided in near-time if changes occur.

#### **3. Multiple Concurrent Approaches**

In order to ensure the best learning and retention by the Trainee it is necessary to use multiple approaches such as:

- Online and other electronic training
- Classes or lectures at professional in-service meetings
- Professional conferences (Talks, poster presentations or exhibits)
- Paper based educational materials
- Instructions readily available at time of certification

March 8, 2007