

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for response to investigations of hospice, terminal, and natural deaths.

II. POLICY

It is the goal of the Westland Police Department to assist the family and friends of the deceased as much as possible, and to protect them from any undue trauma or additional grief. In order to accomplish this goal, the Department will attempt to minimize the instances in which an officer will need to respond to the scene of a natural cause hospice death.

III. PROCEDURE

A. Registration of Patients with the Police Department

1. Hospice Patient

- a. Once notice of a hospice patient is received on an approved form, the form shall be placed in the binder marked "Hospice" at the back desk.
- b. The form must include the original signature of an attending physician, patient (or immediate family member), and Hospice representative. The form must indicate that lifesaving measures are not desired and that a DO NOT RESUSCITATE order is in effect.

2. Terminal Patient

- a. Upon receipt of notice of a terminal patient not under the care of hospice, the desk officer or Police Service Aide (PSA) shall notify the informant that a written notice by the attending physician and family is required.
- b. The written notice must have the signature of the patient, or an immediate family member in the event of the patient's incapacitation. When this notice is received, it shall be placed in the Hospice binder.

B. Police Response to a Hospice Patient Death Notification

1. Upon receiving notification of the death of a hospice patient, the call-taker shall conduct a check of the Hospice file in order to confirm that the deceased was listed with this department as a Hospice Patient. If the deceased is not a listed patient, a police officer shall be sent to the location.
2. If the patient is a registered hospice patient, the call-taker shall:
 - a. Verify that the caller is not requesting a life-saving medical response.
 - b. Initiate an emergency police and fire response, if it is not perfectly clear that the caller is not seeking a life-saving medical response.

- c. Create a Call for Service (CFS) via CAD, if the patient is a registered hospice patient and the call-taker has verified that a lifesaving response is not being requested and/or required by this order.
 - d. Open the CFS, and enter all the required information including the patient's name, address, date of birth, phone number, treating physician, home care nurse, hospice company, home care phone number, medical examiner case number, time of death, cause of death, family member, and funeral home.
 - e. Verify the CFS by using the "Hospice Death C3262" code.
 - f. Place the CFS number on the Hospice Patient Form and forward it to the Support Services Bureau.
 3. If a Response is Required
 - a. Upon arrival at the scene, the police officer shall not administer medical service of any type.
 - b. The officer shall conduct an investigation at the scene, notifying the Medical Examiner's office and obtaining a release of the body from the Medical Examiner.
 - c. In the rare situation when the body is removed from the scene by the Westland Fire Department (WLFD) for humane purposes and transported to the hospital for temporary storage or safe keeping, the officer is required to notify the M.E. of the situation and obtain a release before the hospital will accept the body.
 - d. All officers are to exercise sensitivity to the existing situation.
 - e. The officer assigned to the investigation shall write a complete report.
 - f. PSA's or officers shall place the incident report case number on the Hospice Patient Form if on file and forward it to the Support Services Bureau.
 - g. The Support Services Bureau will file the form with the report
 4. Exception: The Department will provide an emergency response and shall provide whatever medical service as may be required when requested by phone or when at the scene, by a responsible family member.
 5. When in doubt as to the request for medical service, Department personnel shall treat the report of a hospice patient matter as a full medical emergency.
- C. Natural Death Incidents
 1. Some deaths that are reported to the Department will be associated with the death of a terminally ill patient in which an attending physician and family members have been expecting the death to occur. These deaths will not be treated in the same manner as the death of a hospice patient. Deaths of this nature will be treated as a natural death.

2. Upon notice of a natural death, the Department will respond as follows:
 - a. The call taker will create a CFS in CAD for patrol and notify Dispatch for fire units on a death investigation.
 - b. The run will be treated as if we are responding to a life threatening emergency.
3. Exception: If the caller identifies himself or herself as the deceased person's treating physician or home care nurse, or as a family member of the deceased person, if the natural death has been expected due to prior medical indications, and if an emergency response is not desired or requested, the police and fire response shall include the following:
 - a. The Call Taker shall create the run as a "Natural Death Investigation."
 - b. The police will respond in a non-emergency manner.
 - c. The WLFD will respond according to policy.
 - d. Any question as to whether or not medical service is required will result in full medical emergency response and service.
 - e. A police officer shall conduct an investigation at the scene.
 - f. A police officer shall notify the Wayne County Medical Examiner's Office of the death.
 - i. In the event that the deceased was a terminally ill patient who had registered with the Police Department, the officer will provide information about the decedent's illness and the name and telephone information of the treating physician to the Medical Examiner's Office. The officer shall also attempt to contact the treating physician to inform him or her of the death. The officer shall attempt to obtain a release of the body from the Medical Examiner's Office, so that the body of the deceased may be turned over to a funeral home of the family's choosing.
 - ii. In the event that the deceased was not registered with the Department as a terminally ill patient, and it is believed that the decedent died from natural causes, the officer shall attempt to ascertain the identity and then make contact with the treating physician to inform him or her of the death. If contact is made, the officer shall ascertain whether the physician is willing to sign the death certificate. If the physician agrees, the officer will attempt to obtain a release of the body from the Medical Examiner's Office, so that the body of the deceased may be turned over to a funeral home of the family's choosing.
 - iii. If the physician does not agree to sign the death certificate, the officer will provide the Medical Examiner's Office with

this information. The officer shall then stand by at the scene pending the arrival of an investigator from that office. The officer shall provide any assistance that is necessary for the investigator to complete his or her investigation. The officer shall then turn custody of the decedent over to the investigator.