The Next Few DAYS

During times like this, families often feel overwhelmed. It may be hard to concentrate or remember details. Some families have never experienced a death and do not know where to begin in making the necessary arrangements. This is perfectly normal.

This information provides guidance on things you may be thinking about in the next few days.

There are two ways to pronounce death: when a person's heart stops beating or when the brain stops functioning.

UNDERSTANDING BRAIN DEATH

At this time the shock and pain you may feel about your loved one's condition can make it difficult to understand and remember everything that you are being told by the doctors and nurses. Even though the doctor has explained brain death, you may still be unsure what brain death means. This explanation may help.

The brain cannot survive without oxygen. Brain death occurs when there is no blood or oxygen supplied to the brain. Without blood and oxygen, the brain cells die. When the brain dies, the person cannot move, breathe, think, or feel. Pain and suffering cease.

Brain death is death, and cannot be reversed. Often people confuse brain death with a deep coma or vegetative state. With a deep coma, there has been significant brain injury but there is slight brain activity. With brain death, there is no brain activity.

Brain death can be difficult to accept because it may look as if the person is sleeping. The ventilator (breathing machine) fills the lungs with oxygen and helps keep the skin color normal and warm. Since the heart has its own pacemaker independent of the brain and oxygen is being supplied to the body, the heart continues to beat. It can be difficult to accept that the brain can be dead and the heart continues to beat.

Very specific tests are performed by the doctor to determine if brain death has occurred. Doctors must independently examine the patient and determine the person is brain dead before death is declared.

UNDERSTANDING DONATION... WHEN BRAIN DEATH IS DETERMINED

The doctor has informed me that my loved one is brain dead. What does that mean?

Brain death occurs in patients who have suffered severe injury to the brain. The brain can be injured from a lack of oxygen, due to a trauma in another part of the body. As a result of the injury, the brain swells and obstructs its own blood supply, causing brain tissue to die, and permanent loss of brain function. This condition is irreversible.

DONATION QUESTIONS

When does a person become a donor?

Donation is an opportunity only after all attempts to save your loved one have failed and death has been pronounced. The process of donation takes place only after physicians (who are not associated with the donation process) declare a person brain dead by using strict neurological criteria.

How long is the ventilator kept on after a person is declared brain dead?

Once donation is authorized, the KODA team will work towards finding the recipients and arranging a surgery time in the operating room. In order to provide oxygen to the vital organs, your loved one will remain on the ventilator until the organs are recovered.

What is the recorded time of death for a brain dead person?

The recorded time of death is when the physician pronounces the patient brain dead. Medically and legally, the person is deceased at that point and the recorded time of brain death will be documented on the death certificate.

Are all families approached about the opportunity for organ donation?

The opportunity of donation is offered to all medically suitable patients.

When tissue donation is an opportunity, what gifts may be used to save/improve lives of others?

- Corneas restore sight.
- Skin grafts are a temporary covering to reduce pain and lower the chance of infection to patients with severe burns.
- Heart valves help children born with heart problems or adults who have a heart valve damaged by disease.
- Bone is used to repair or replace bone after serious injury, bone cancer, or crippling diseases of the bone.
- Blood vessels improve circulation and prevent amputation of limbs.

DCD (DONATION AFTER CARDIAC DEATH) A SHORT DESCRIPTION

DCD is an option for families of patients with severe brain damage, but who do not meet the criteria for brain death. After the physician determines the patient has no chance of survival and the family has decided to withdraw life support, the family is offered the option of Donation After Cardiac Death.

Following the family's authorization for donation, KODA's Clinical Coordinator staff works diligently to find suitable recipients for their loved one's gifts and coordinates the pending recovery. Their loved one is then moved to an operating room where the patient's physician withdraws life support. The patient's heart must stop beating within one hour following the removal of life support for organ donation to be possible. Should the heart not stop beating within the alloted time frame, the patient may still be able to help others through the gift of tissue and eye donation. Once the patient's heart stops beating, the physician declares death. An additional five minutes is given after the declaration of death to ensure the heart does not start beating again and then organ recovery begins.

Donation After Cardiac Death gives the family of the patient an additional option for organ donation. If a patient wishes to be a donor, DCD is an additional way to honor the individual's wishes.

A caring, representative from KODA's Family Support Liaison staff will provide support and information to families throughout the entire DCD process.

WILL WE FIND OUT ABOUT THE RECIPIENTS OF THE DONATION?

Your family will receive a letter explaining which organs/tissues were recovered and transplanted. For organs donated, we can share general information about the recipients who were helped because of your generous decision to donate. As for tissues, we do not know this information and tissue can be used for up to five years. Some surgeons however do encourage tissue recipients to send a thank you to the donor families.

WHEN CAN WE HAVE THE FUNERAL?

The donation process may take 24 hours or more; however, donation does not usually delay funeral arrangements. KODA staff members will work closely with the funeral home to meet the needs of your family in a manner that is respectful and efficient so that there isn't undue delay or alteration of funeral arrangements.

IS AN OPEN VIEWING FUNERAL POSSIBLE AFTER ORGAN AND/OR TISSUE RECOVERY?

Most donations do not cause noticeable changes in the appearance of the body because physicians and KODA staff members show the utmost degree of compassion, care and respect for the donor in recovery of organs, eyes and tissue. The recovery of life-saving and life-enhancing organs and tissues does not ordinarily interfere with customary funeral arrangements. An open viewing funeral is possible in most cases.

WHY MAY THE CORONER BE INVOLVED?

If the Coroner is involved they will complete their investigation as soon as possible, determine if an autopsy is necessary and release the body to the funeral home of the family's choice.

WILL AN AUTOPSY BE PERFORMED?

The Coroner will determine if an autopsy is necessary. The basic reason for an autopsy is to determine the medical cause of death. Another reason is to gather evidence for presentation in a court of law. At a later date, this information could be very helpful.

WILL KODA HELP WITH FUNERAL EXPENSES?

KODA is not permitted to financially assist with the funeral or the funeral arrangements.

ARE WE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH DONATION?

All costs related to organ and tissue donation will be paid by KODA. Hospital costs incurred before the authorization for donation remain the responsibility of the relatives or persons in charge of the estate and can be discussed with a financial counselor from the hospital.

PLANNING A FUNERAL

Arrangements for your loved one's funeral can be made after you leave the hospital. Family, friends, and/or the funeral director can help with the final arrangements. If you need help finding a funeral home, we suggest that you ask family and friends who have experienced the death of a loved one for advice. It may be helpful to have a family member or close friend accompany you to the funeral home.

PLANNING A FUNERAL (CONTINUED)

Be sure to take with you:

Your loved one's name, date and place of birth, Social Security number, occupation, parents' names and (if a veteran) proof of military service.

The funeral home will assist you with other documents, information and next steps.

- **If applicable, ask your bank to release joint bank account funds to you.** In some states, joint bank accounts are automatically frozen upon the death of one spouse. You may need to set up a new bank account for yourself.
- **Secure an ample number of certified copies of the death certificate.**
- **Notify the insurance companies in writing**. Each company will need a statement of claim and a death certificate before survivors can receive benefits.

MANAGING FINAL DETAILS

You have suffered an emotionally devastating event and it is overwhelming to consider financial and legal matters during such a difficult time. **Some of these tasks should be addressed rather quickly, while other items can be done in the weeks following the funeral.** These details are important and you may need to reach out to a trusted friend or family member to assist you.

Consider the following:

- **If appropriate, notify your child's school.** Let the school know there has been a death in the family and there may be a prolonged absence for grieving and needed grief counseling when they return.
- **Have someone keep careful records of phone calls, flowers, donations and visitors.**
- **Find important papers** such as deeds, bankbooks or account statements, stock certificates or investment account statements and insurance policies.
- **Locate important certificates:** marriage certificate, your loved one's birth certificate, military discharge papers, Social Security card, tax forms and birth certificates of any minor children. These records are needed to establish claims for Social Security, life insurance or veteran's benefits.
- **If your loved one was living alone**, notify the landlord and utilities, and tell the Post Office where to send the mail.

Keep copies of all correspondence.

- **Contact the Social Security office to find out if you are eligible for new benefits**. Social Security benefits are not automatically paid out after a death; you must apply for them. Learn more about the benefits at www.ssa.gov or call: 1-800-772-1213.
- **Contact your loved one's employer, union, group or professional organization in which he or she may have had an association.** Many of these organizations have insurance policies of which you may be the beneficiary. Also inquire about any 401(k), pension or company stock benefits. If your loved one was a veteran, apply for veteran's benefits at the nearest Veterans Administration office. Keep copies of all correspondence.
- **If applicable, advise all creditors in writing that your spouse has died.** If you have any loans, find out if they are insured.
- **You may wish to consult with a lawyer prior to making any decisions, including any will or estate matters.**

DOCUMENTS YOU WILL NEED

The following is a variety of important documents you will need in the coming weeks when filing for various benefits or dealing with financial matters. Funeral home staff, a trusted friend or your faith leader may offer additional information or guidance.

Death Certificate: Ask your funeral director for the process in obtaining a copy in your area. You may also consider contacting your state's Office of Vital Statistics for assistance. Certified copies will be required by some companies and additional certified copies can be purchased. To save money, use a photo copy when permissible.

Marriage certificate: Available from the county clerk where the marriage license was issued.

Birth certificates for the deceased and any dependent children. Available at either the state or county public records offices where the person was born.

Social Security numbers for the deceased, spouse and dependent children.

Discharge papers. If the deceased was a veteran, you will need a copy of the discharge certificate. If you cannot find a copy, contact National Personnel Records Center, 1 Archives Drive, St. Louis, MO 63138 or https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records

Original Will. The lawyer who wrote the will may have the original, or it may be with the personal belongings of the deceased or in a safe deposit box. Some banks have special procedures before letting anyone into the safe deposit box.

List of property. A complete list of what the deceased owned, including real estate stocks, bonds, bank accounts, deeds and personal property.

Recent income tax returns. If you cannot locate a copy of the most recent income tax return, you need to fill out IRS Form 4506. You will need to attach documentation that you are authorized to act on behalf of the deceased, such as letters from the probate court.

You Are Not Alone

On behalf of the entire staff of the Kentucky Organ Donor Affiliates, we extend our deepest condolences. Your loved one's generous gift provides hope to others and creates a lasting, heroic legacy. We hold your family in high regard and will honor their memory as we continue to honor the gift of donation in our service to donor families each day.

WE ARE HERE FOR YOU

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AFTERCARE SERVICES

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AFTERCARE
Program