

DATE: August 21, 2019**C19-115****TO: All Coroners, Chiefs of Police and the Commissioner of the
OPP****CC: All Pathologists, Funeral Establishments, Regional
Supervising Coroners****FROM: Dr. Dirk Huyer
Chief Coroner for Ontario****Dr. Michael Pollanen
Chief Forensic Pathologist for Ontario****RE: Continuity of Deceased Persons**

It is a priority of the Office of the Chief Coroner/Ontario Forensic Pathology Service (OCC/OFPS) to ensure the integrity of an investigation through preservation of evidence and the maintenance of continuity. This communication provides the procedures required so that all deceased persons have the appropriate documentation and have been accurately labelled when transferred for autopsy or storage.

Continuity, which is meant to ensure a particularly labelled deceased person is from a known location, must be maintained and verifiable throughout a transfer from a scene to a pathology unit. As a result, appropriate labelling and documentation is required. A flow diagram has been attached to summarize the process.

Continuity of Deceased Persons

In most cases, a coroner will attend and examine the body. During this assessment an appropriate tag will be affixed to label the deceased person. This tag is to be completed regardless of whether the identity of the deceased person is confirmed at the time of coroner's attendance, e.g., if the person is unidentified, continuity is maintained through labelling with "*Unidentified from <location>*". If there are multiple deceased persons from the same scene the label should indicate "*Unidentified #1 from <location>*",

“*Unidentified #2 from <location>*”, etc. Indelible ink must be used to prevent the loss or damage of this labelling. For deaths that occur in a health care facility, patient identification bands are typically suitable, however the coroners should validate that the name and spelling are accurate.

Transfer from Scene

If the coroner is not able to attend the scene or location of the deceased person and affix a tag to the body themselves, they may delegate a police officer to complete the task. This officer shall apply a tag documenting the name of the deceased person (or “*Unidentified from <location>*” if identity has not been confirmed), date, location, coroner’s name, and the officer’s name and badge number. A police forensic seal must also be applied to the body.

The body pouch must be secured with a police forensic seal prior to transfer of the deceased person. The two forensic seal numbers must be documented in the officer’s notebook and the police report. Photographic documentation of the seal(s) would be beneficial.

When deceased persons are transferred to the Provincial Forensic Pathology Unit (PFPU) in Toronto the police report will be shared with the pathologist by sending a copy of the report to the pathology unit or to OCCDispatchers@ontario.ca. Unit specific approaches should be followed when the deceased person is transferred to other pathology units – discussion should occur with the Regional Supervising Coroner or the pathology unit.

Transfer from Funeral Home

In circumstances where a deceased person is transferred directly from a funeral home, i.e. need for a post mortem examination after the deceased person is in the care of the funeral home, the coroner shall direct the funeral home personnel/Human Remains Transfer Specialist to affix an identification tag to the deceased person documenting the deceased person’s name, date, location, coroner’s name, and the name and signature of the person who completed and applied the tag.

When transfer to the PFPU occurs, OCC/OFPS approved tags will be provided to the transfer personnel for completion and placement on the deceased person prior to the release into the care of the mortuary attendant. Unit specific approaches should be followed when the deceased person is transferred to other pathology units – discussion should occur with the Regional Supervising Coroner or the pathology unit.

OCC/OFPS Issued Tags Unavailable to Coroner

On the rare occasion, when a coroner has attended the scene but does not have any OCC/OFPS issued tags to label the deceased person, they will affix a tag documenting the deceased person’s name (or “*Unidentified from <location>*” if identity has not been confirmed), date, location, coroner’s name and signature.

In all cases the coroner shall inform the pathologist that a non-OCC/OFPS issued tag was used to label the deceased person, or that the transfer personnel was directed to complete the tag, on the coroner’s Warrant for PM.

Any issues surrounding the labeling of the deceased person should be discussed between the coroner and the pathologist directly. With effective labelling of the deceased person, death investigation personnel can easily confirm a particular deceased person's origin.

Please do not hesitate to contact your Regional Supervising Coroner or Deputy Chief Coroner, Dr. Reuven Jhirad if you have any questions regarding this communication.



Dr. Dirk Huyer
Chief Coroner for Ontario



Dr. Michael Pollanen
Chief Forensic Pathologist for Ontario

Attachment - C-DOC-CI-03 Labelling of Deceased Persons