ELNEC COVID-19 Communication Resource Guide

An APRN Telephone Death Notification to Family Tool

PREPARATION

1) Make the call as soon as possible after the death.
2) Prepare for the call by talking with a colleague about the deceased to review the events of the last few days.
3) Gather and verify the facts about the patient – name, gender, age, medical record number, and circumstances of death. Have the chart available, if possible, depending on the location where you will take the call.
4) Establish the next of kin to be notified – contact person, full name(s), address(es), relationship to the patient.
5) Arrange for a medical interpreter, if needed.
6) Review with a colleague the context of the call, the history of the care, and what you will say.
7) Take a few moments to collect and prepare oneself – with a mindfulness minute or deep breathing.
8) Find a quiet space to call.
9) Remember to talk slowly and use simple language

MAKING THE CALL

10) Consider using technology to block personal phone telephone number such as *67, Doximity,
11) Initiate call.
    - If call goes to voice mail - do not leave information about the death. Leave your specific contact information such as Martha Mark, CNS at West Hospital. Please call me back at the following number.
12) Identify yourself and your position at the health care facility.
13) Ask to speak to the contact person and verify their relationship to the deceased.
14) Provide a warning shot – “I am afraid I have some serious/difficult news to share.”
15) Ask if person has anyone with them or if they are driving.
16) Allow them time to get to a room with another person or call another person or to pull over on the road.
17) Check in they are ready to receive the news.

DELIVERING THE NEWS

18) Provide clear and direct language – “I am so sorry to inform you that, X has just died. “I am sad to have to tell you X has just died.”
    - Do not use euphemism such as passed on, expired or didn’t make it as you do not want to be ambiguous.
19) Allow time and silence for the family member/friend to take in the information.
20) Be prepared for the expression of emotions.
21) Offer simple details about what happened if the family member/loved one asks.
    a. Explain how the patient was doing earlier and the sudden deterioration.
    b. Explain the possible reasons for the sudden deterioration.
22) Allow the family members to ask additional questions and express feelings.
23) Provide therapeutic listening and support.
CLOSING THE CALL

1) Offer information about next steps
   a. Ability to view the body at the facility
   b. Basic guidance about funeral planning

2) Offer follow-up phone calls by the social worker, chaplaincy to help with support and funeral planning.

3) Provide information about follow-up telephone calls from the hospital including the release of the body.

4) Offer condolences and a statement for having to receive this information by phone - “Again, my condolences on your loss. I wish I had been able to tell you this in person.”

5) Document the call in the chart.

6) Notify the clinical team and the bereavement liaison that called has been completed.

7) Take a moment to reflect and provide a positive affirmation for providing a difficult call with empathy.

- C Dahlin for ELNEC COVID-19 Communication Resources
References


Guest M. How to inform relatives and loved ones of a patient's death. Nurs Stand. 2016;30(34):36-38. doi:10.7748/ns.30.34.36.s45


