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**TITLE: TRANSPORT OF DECEASED PERSONS****DISTRIBUTION: ALL PUBLIC HOSPITALS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

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### **1. Purpose**

The purpose of this technical bulletin is to provide guidelines regarding the return of the body when people die whilst on inter-hospital transfer or Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATS) assisted travel. This policy applies within Western Australia only. Refer to the Interstate Patient Travel Scheme for guidelines regarding the return of the body when people die following interstate assisted travel for medical treatment.

### **2. Background**

Under current Department of Health policy the country health service meets the cost of returning the body to the country hospital for people living north of the 26<sup>th</sup> parallel who die within WA whilst on inter-hospital transfer or PATS.

The State Health Management Team recently approved a proposal to extend this assistance to country residents living below the 26<sup>th</sup> parallel who hold a current Health Care Card and die whilst on inter-hospital transfer or PATS. Assistance is also provided to the mother and child where the child dies after birth.

The attached form has been developed to assist health services to assess eligibility for assistance.

### **3. Organising Transport of Deceased Persons**

The Hospital Liaison Service for Aboriginal people has relevant experience and expertise in arranging transport for Aboriginal people above the 26<sup>th</sup> parallel and is going to extend this service to Aboriginal people living below the 26<sup>th</sup> parallel where requested. The contact number is 9382 4144.

For non-Aboriginal people, the family of the deceased in consultation with the country hospital closest to the deceased person's place of residence, should make the transport arrangements. The Hospital Liaison Service for Aboriginal People can provide advice.

Assistance is provided to return the body to the cold storage facility used by funeral director closest to the deceased person's residence (See Morgue Facilities below).

#### **Air travel**

When the body is to be returned by air, a metropolitan/regional funeral director service is contracted to prepare the body and transport it to the airport. The

metropolitan/regional funeral director will arrange for the local country funeral director to collect the body from the airport. The Hospital Liaison Service for Aboriginal People (see above) can assist in identifying low cost funeral directors in the metropolitan area.

### **Road travel**

When the body is to be returned by road, the country funeral director would normally arrange for the body preparation, collection from hospital, appropriate storage as required and transport.

As a general rule, families are discouraged from transporting the body of a deceased person themselves. In these circumstances the only financial assistance provided is the assistance that the family would be entitled to under PATS (PATS Guidelines Section 4.4).

## **4. Assistance provided**

Where applicable, the Health Service will pay for the costs of air freight or road transport whichever is the cheaper. In cases where there is more than one funeral director available, two quotes should be obtained for the transport of the deceased person. Assistance to the value of the lowest quote is offered.

The family of the deceased is responsible for all costs associated with burial, other than those that are essential for the safe transport of the deceased person. That is:

### **Air freight**

When the deceased person is to be transported by air, the Health Service will pay for the costs of body preparation including death registration, transfers and provision of a basic coffin suitable for transport and burial.

### **Road transport**

When the deceased person is to be transported by road, the health service will pay for the costs of body preparation including death registration and transfers. The Health Service will also pay for provision of a coffin in cases where a coffin is necessary in order for the safe transport of the deceased person, for example, when the deceased person is to be transported in a vehicle that does not have a purpose built cold storage compartment. The coffin provided should be a basic coffin suitable for burial. Families may pay the additional cost to upgrade the coffin should they wish. However, in instances where the Department for Community Development is providing assistance with the costs of burial, that Department will meet all costs other than the cost of road transport (see below).

### **Assistance from the Department for Community Development**

In cases of financial hardship, the Department for Community Development (DCD) may pay for the cost of a basic burial. Families should apply for assistance through their local office of the Department for Community Development. The Department of Community Development has awarded contracts to funeral directors across the State to provide this service. A list of contractors can be obtained from the Manager, Family Crisis Program on 9350 7227.

In cases where DCD assistance with costs of burial is provided, quotes for transport are not required. The relevant DCD contractor should be used to provide road travel.

The following agreement regarding costs of body preparation and the coffin is in place in cases where the Department for Community Development has agreed to provide assistance with burial costs:

**Air travel**

If the body is transported by air, the Department of Health will pay for the body preparation and basic coffin.

**Road travel**

If the body is returned by road, the Department of Community Development will pay for the costs of body preparation and the coffin.

Note. In the case of Department of Veterans (DVA) Gold or White card holders, the DVA should be approached regarding assistance to return the body of patients who die following approved travel assistance for medical treatment.

**5. Morgue Facilities**

Funeral Directors are responsible for providing cold storage of bodies prior to the funeral. The country hospital morgue may only be used by prior agreement between the funeral director and local hospital. The death certificate must be provided and the deceased person must be entered in the morgue register. Country hospital morgues cannot provide prolonged storage and bodies should, therefore, be left at the metropolitan/regional centre until immediately prior to the funeral.

Viewing of bodies held in hospital morgues on behalf of a funeral director can only take place with prior agreement of the hospital and must be arranged and supervised by the funeral director.

**6. Data collection**

Regions will be requested to report on an annual basis on the number and cost of transport for deceased persons in order for the financial impact of this policy to be monitored.

**7. Financial recording**

Health Services should record expenditure for this item under Account Code 3316 Patient Transport - other

**8. References**

Operational Instruction OP 1281/00 Procedures for the Handling of Dead Bodies, Including Persons Dying as a Result of Dangerous Infectious Diseases.

PATS Guidelines July 2002, Section 4.4.

Interstate Patient Travel Scheme (IPTS) Guidelines.

