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Medical Certification of Cause of Death

Practical 02 / Clinical or documentation case

Aim

Complete a fictional cause-of-death statement with the causal sequence and relevant contributing conditions.

Principle

Part I records the sequence that led to death from the immediate cause back to the underlying cause. Part II records other significant contributing conditions outside that sequence.

Materials and Requirements

- Institutional practice form modelled on the applicable MCCD form
- Fictional authorised hospital case
- Chronology worksheet

Procedure

1. Review the available clinical record and determine whether certification can proceed through the authorised pathway in the scenario.
2. In the fictional record verify identity, date and location of death, the responsible certifier and whether relevant history and records are available. Identify scenarios requiring an authorised referral.
3. Identify the immediate disease or complication and work back through antecedent conditions in plausible causal order.
4. Begin with the condition directly leading to death and ask what caused it. Continue until the underlying disease or injury that initiated the chain is reached where evidence supports it.

Continue with step 5 on the next page.

Procedure Continued

Medical Certification of Cause of Death

5. Test the sequence by reading the lower line as the cause of the line above. Use specific disease terms and include a documented context needed to understand the sequence.
6. Record approximate intervals if supported. Use separate lines for linked conditions and add unrelated contributors in Part II.
7. Enter the approximate duration from onset to death on each applicable line. Add significant conditions that contributed outside the direct causal chain in Part II and review the timing for plausibility.
8. Check legibility and specificity. Refer uncertain, unexpected or medico-legal scenarios to the appropriate process.
9. Compare names, dates, diagnosis and durations with the records. Present a legible teaching certificate or document why the responsible clinician needs further evidence before completion.

Precautions

- Use approved local forms and pathways for real cases.
- Do not certify a cause beyond the information or authority available.

Observations and Interpretation

Medical Certification of Cause of Death

Observations and Record

Item	What to record	What it tells you
Part I top line	Immediate disease or complication	First condition in the written chain
Part I lower lines	Antecedent and underlying conditions	Explains what initiated the chain
Part II	Other significant contributors	Adds context outside the direct chain

Worked Example

In a fictional authorised natural-death record, aspiration pneumonia arose after a documented acute stroke with dysphagia. Record the clinician-supported sequence in Part I and add a separate contributing disease only if supported.

Result and Interpretation

Provide a coherent training certificate and explain why a mode of dying alone, such as cardiac arrest, gives insufficient cause information.

Viva Questions and Answers

What is the underlying cause?

The condition or event that initiated the sequence leading to death.

Where do other contributing conditions go?

Part II when they contribute outside the Part I causal chain.

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