

Sign-Out No Autopsy (SONA) Cases

1145.1 DEFINITION

A SONA case involves the process of the Coroner signing a death certificate based upon review of clinical diagnoses in lieu of performing an autopsy. SONA cases are deaths:

- (a) Occurring in a medical facility or on hospice care
- (b) Where the cause of death has been diagnosed by the treating physician
- (c) The cause of death falls under the jurisdiction of the Coroner
- (d) The treating physician is willing and able to co-sign the death certificate with the Coroner
- (e) The manner of death is accident or suicide
 - 1. A homicide death may very rarely qualify for SONA; refer to section 1145.2.1(a) of this policy
- (f) A postmortem examination and/or related testing will not augment the death investigation.

Deaths with nuances outside of this definition may be considered for SONA at the discretion of the Coroner Watch Commander.

1145.2 CASES EXCLUDED FROM SONA

The following deaths are not eligible for SONA consideration and shall undergo a postmortem examination prior to Coroner death certificate signature:

- (a) Homicide deaths or those related to an active criminal investigation
 - 1. A significantly delayed homicide, where criminal charges have been adjudicated, may be considered for the SONA process with approval of the Coroner Division Commander or his/her designee.
- (b) In-custody deaths
- (c) Officer-involved deaths
- (d) Any traffic related fatality with pending major criminal charges, or where the death occurs less than 48 hours after the incident
 - 1. Traffic related fatality deaths with pending criminal charges may be considered for SONA with consent from the handling law enforcement agency and approval of the Coroner Watch Commander
- (e) Any suspected overdose or poisoning where admitting antemortem blood samples are available and toxicology levels have not been quantitated by a laboratory
- (f) Any death where the cause is only presumed or suspected and has not been established diagnostically

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- (g) Any death where there is an investigative need for autopsy examination, or where the manner of death may be in question

1145.3 BODY EXAMS

SONA cases do not require a body examination unless requested by the Coroner Watch Commander, assigned Deputy Coroner, or pathologist.

1145.4 INVESTIGATION

Upon receiving the report of a death and determining the case to be a possible candidate for SONA consideration, Deputy Coroners shall initiate an investigation to include:

- (a) Statements from medical providers, family members, witnesses, or other person(s) most knowledgeable
- (b) Obtain, review, and summarize pertinent medical records
- (c) Obtain, review, and summarize pertinent police, incident, or social service (example: Adult Protective Services) reports
- (d) Search criminal histories
- (e) Obtain the treating physician's proposed cause of death, and determine his/her willingness to co-sign the death certificate with the Coroner
- (f) Place a hold on antemortem blood specimens, if available
- (g) Document his/her progress in CME on the page titled "SONA Tracking"

1145.5 REVIEW PROCESS

The on-duty dayshift Coroner Watch Commander or his/her designee shall review the Deputy Coroner's case report and present the facts to a pathologist along with all available medical records. Together, both parties shall assess the case history and circumstances. The pathologist will then indicate his/her agreement with the cause of death proposed by the treating physician. If he/she agrees with said proposed cause, the case shall continue through the SONA process and the death certificate shall be co-signed by the Coroner. If he/she disagrees with the proposed cause, the case shall be transported to the Coroner Division for autopsy examination.

The Coroner Watch Commander shall document the name of the pathologist reviewing the case in CME on the page titled "SONA Tracking."

1145.6 SIGNING THE DEATH CERTIFICATE

When the cause of death has been mutually agreed upon by the treating physician and pathologist, the Coroner Watch Commander shall determine that all investigative elements have been satisfied and then notify the Clerical Unit to initiate processing of the death certificate. The Clerical Unit will

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coordinate with the selected mortuary for physician and Coroner attestation. All actions shall be documented via completion of the applicable fields in CME on the page titled "SONA Tracking." Once the death certificate has been attested by all parties, the case shall be returned to the assigned Deputy Coroner who may submit the case for closure.