
Death in hospital

Summary

- Whether the person died from a chronic (continuing) illness or a sudden event, the hospital staff will be sympathetic and are available to answer any questions or explain anything you don't understand.
 - The hospital will care for the deceased person until plans have been made with your chosen funeral director.
 - The doctor will advise you if the death requires the attention of the coroner.
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A death in hospital may or may not have been expected. Whether the person has died from a chronic (ongoing) illness or a sudden event, hospital staff are sympathetic and are available to answer any questions or explain anything you, the family member or carer, don't understand.

You should feel free to stay at the hospital for as long as you wish and talk to the staff. Let the hospital staff know when you are ready to leave. The hospital will care for the deceased person until plans have been made with your chosen funeral director. The doctor will advise you if the death requires the attention of the coroner.

Role of the coroner for a death in hospital

The State coroner investigates a death if the death appears to have:

- been unexpected, unnatural or violent
- resulted, directly or indirectly, from an accident or injury
- occurred during a medical procedure.

An autopsy may be needed to find out why the person died.

The coroner requires that the person's body be left exactly as it was at the time of death. The Coroner's Office arranges for the deceased person to be taken to the Coronial Services Centre. You can request that no autopsy be conducted. This request should be directed straight to the Coroner's Office. Further information on the coronial process can be found at www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au.

After a death in hospital

When you get home, you may want to contact family and friends. It is good to seek company and support at this time. Hospital staff members can contact people for you if you wish. The hospital also has social workers and pastoral care staff who can help you. Ask the hospital staff how to contact them.

Organising the funeral

You may need to check if a prepaid funeral has been organised or if there were special requests in regards to the funeral. If there are no existing plans, you will need to contact the funeral director of your choice. A list of funeral directors can be found under 'F' in the *Yellow Pages* or by searching online. Hospital staff, social workers and pastoral care workers may also be able to give you advice.

Organising a funeral is an important part of grieving, so it is worth spending time to plan the funeral that you and the deceased person would want. If you need help, the funeral director can take care of all aspects of the funeral, such as ordering flowers, putting notices in the newspaper and handling the legal paperwork for either burial or

cremation.

Grieving after a death in hospital

No one can tell you how to grieve. Grief is personal and private. It's a journey you take and no two people will grieve the same way. It is important to give yourself and your family and friends enough time to grieve.

There is no 'normal' length of time for grieving and you may feel a wide range of emotions. These may include shock, sadness, numbness, anger, guilt, fear, anxiety, relief and a profound sense of aloneness. The feeling of loss doesn't go away, but the intensity will ease. Live one day at a time.

It may help to ask for support from family and friends. Make sure that you take care of your diet and get enough rest.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Hospital staff, including social workers
- Coroners Court of Victoria Tel. 1300 309 519
- Community health service
- Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement – bereavement counselling and support services Tel. (03) 9265 2100 or 1300 642 066 (Australia-wide)
- GriefLine Community and Family Services Inc. – loss and grief telephone counselling service, 12 noon to 3 am, seven days a week Tel. (03) 9935 7400 or 1300 845 745
- Lifeline – crisis support and suicide prevention services, 24 hours, 7 days Tel. 13 11 14.
- SuicideLine Victoria – for counselling, crisis intervention, information and referral (24 hours, 7 days) Tel. 1300 651 251
- Kids Help Line – telephone counselling, 24 hours a day, seven days a week Tel. 1800 55 1800
- MensLine Australia – 24 hours a day, seven days a week Tel. 1300 78 99 78
- The Compassionate Friends Victoria – grief support after the death of a son, daughter, brother or sister Tel. (03) 9888 4944 or 1800 641 091
- Parentline Victoria – 8 am to 12 midnight, 7 days a week Tel. 13 22 89
- Road Trauma Support Services Victoria Tel. (03) 8877 6900 or 1300 367 797
- SANDS Victoria (Stillborn and newborn death support) Tel. (03) 9899 0217
- SIDS and Kids Victoria – 24 hours a day, seven days a week Tel. (03) 8888 1600 or 1300 308 307
- Australian Funeral Directors Association Tel. (03) 9859 9966 or 1300 888 188

Things to remember

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This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement

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