

**AN EPIDEMIOLOGY PUBLICATION OF THE OREGON DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES**

**WHAT'S YOUR DEATH IQ?**

**D**EATH IS NOT a pleasant topic for anyone, especially for those whose professions are devoted to saving and protecting lives. However, death is the ultimate "fact of life." By law, every death in Oregon (30,208 of them in 2001) must be registered with the Center for Health Statistics (CHS).

Oregon's death certificates are used for at least two purposes: to provide a legal record of the death and to collect mortality data. Without death certificates many of the highly stimulating *CD Summaries* you love to read every other week would not be possible.

To make this deadly topic (to some) more entertaining (and to promote the correct filling out of death certificates) this week's *CD Summary* tests your "death IQ".

- Who can fill out and sign the medical portion of the Oregon death certificate?
  - funeral directors
  - family members
  - physicians
  - nurse practitioners
  - c and d.
- How quickly after receipt must the medical portion of the death certificate be completed, signed and returned to the funeral service provider?
  - 24 hours
  - 48 hours
  - 1 week
  - 10 days
  - by the end of the month.
- What percentage of death certificates are returned to certifying physicians for clarification or additional information?
  - 5%
  - 10%
  - 15%
  - 20%
  - 25%.
- The underlying cause of death is that disease condition that ultimately led to the death. Where should it be listed on the death certificate?
 

(See figure.)

  - on the top line of Part I in the cause of death section
  - on the lowest used line of Part I

- organic heart disease
  - kidney failure
  - cardiac arrest
  - a, b, and c
  - none of the above.
- What was the leading cause of death of Oregonians during 2001?
    - suicide
    - cancer
    - unintentional injuries
    - heart disease
    - filbert aspiration.
  - Which family of animals kills more Oregonians than any other?
    - Culicidae
    - Vespidae
    - Canidae
    - Equidae
    - Hominidae.
  - When can the signature of the certifying physician differ from the name typed or written as the certifying physician?
    - never
    - sometimes
    - always
    - on Mondays
    - it doesn't matter since we can't read the signature anyway.
  - How can the medical portion of the death certificate be changed once the death certificate has been registered at the county vital records office?
    - by submitting an entirely new certificate
    - calling up the state vital records office and badgering the State Registrar
    - submitting an affidavit to correct a death certificate
    - asking the funeral home to change the certificate
    - none of the above.

- Which of the sections of the death certificate can be left blank?
  - item 36: cause of death
  - item 37: tobacco use
  - item 38: autopsy
  - item 40: manner of death
  - none of the above.
- Which of the following killed the most Oregonians in 2001?
  - falls
  - traffic crashes
  - overdoses/poisonings
  - drownings
  - electrocution via nipple rings.
- The Medical Examiner must be notified of all accidental deaths. If the ME takes jurisdiction, he or she fills out the death certificate. If the ME does not take jurisdiction, who should complete the items on the death certificate related to the injury (41a-41f, below)?
  - the ME
  - the certifying physician
  - Items 41a-41f can be left blank
  - the funeral home
  - the state vital records office.
- Where can I to get more information on completing the cause of death portion of the death certificate?
  - Center for Health Statistics web site
  - call
  - e-mail
  - National Center for Health Statistics
  - all of the above.

**ANSWERS**

1. Answer: (e). By law only licensed Oregon medical, osteopathic, chiropractic or naturopathic physicians, or certified Oregon nurse practitioners can complete, sign, or change the medical portion of the death certificate.

|   |   |  |                     |  |
|---|---|--|---------------------|--|
| WHICH GAVE RISE TO IMMEDIATE CAUSE STATING THE UNDERLYING CAUSE LAST<br>↓<br>CAUSE OF DEATH | 36. IMMEDIATE CAUSE (ENTER ONLY ONE CAUSE PER LINE FOR (a), (b), AND (c). Do not enter mode of dying, e.g. Cardiac or Respiratory Arrest.   |  |                     | Interval between onset and death   |
|   | PART I<br>(a) _____<br>DUE TO, OR AS A CONSEQUENCE OF:<br>(b) _____<br>DUE TO, OR AS A CONSEQUENCE OF:<br>(c) _____   |  |                     | Interval between onset and death   |
| CAUSE OF DEATH  | PART II OTHER SIGNIFICANT CONDITIONS -<br>Conditions contributing to death but not resulting in the underlying cause given in PART I.   |  |                     | Interval between onset and death   |
|   | 40. MANNER OF DEATH<br><input type="checkbox"/> Natural<br><input type="checkbox"/> Accident<br><input type="checkbox"/> Suicide<br><input type="checkbox"/> Homicide<br><input type="checkbox"/> Other | 41a. DATE OF INJURY (Month, Day, Year) | 41b. TIME OF INJURY | 41c. INJURY AT WORK?<br><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 15. _____   | 41e. PLACE OF INJURY - At home, farm, street, factory, office building, etc. (Specify)  |  |                     | 41f. LOCATION (Street and Number or Rural Route Number, City or Town, State)     |
| 16. _____   | 37. Did tobacco use contribute to the death?<br><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Probably <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown                             |  |                     | 38. AUTOPSY<br><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No          |
| 17. _____   | 39. If YES were findings considered in determining cause of death?<br><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A   |  |                     |  |

(a) on the top line of Part I in the cause of death section (b) on the lowest used line of Part I



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If you would prefer to have your *CD Summary* delivered by e-mail, zap your request to [cd.summary@state.or.us](mailto:cd.summary@state.or.us). Please include your full name and address (not just your e-mail address), so that we can effectively purge you from our print mailing list, thus helping to save trees, taxpayer dollars, postal worker injuries, etc.

2. Answer: (b) 48 hours, by law.

3. Answer: (b). Every month, about 10 percent of all death certificates (250–300) must be sent back to physicians to get more information or clarification. These queries are mailed to physicians, and the response to a query is a legal change to a legal document. Changes can be made directly on the form and must be signed and dated; changes cannot be made without an original signature. Do it right the first time, and you won't have to be bothered by a pesky query from us.

4. Answer: (b). The underlying cause of death should always be listed on the lowest used line in Part 1; it is the disease condition, injury, or poisoning that initiated the train of events that led to death. For example, a person who died from diabetes mellitus might be listed in the following manner: Part 1. (a) Congestive heart failure; (b) Peripheral vascular disease; (c) Diabetes mellitus. (Think of underlying as “at the bottom.”) More detail is better than less. Realistically, it is sometimes difficult to determine conditions that led to the patient's death. In such cases, a certifier should select the causes that are suspected to have been involved, and use qualifiers such as “probable” or “presumed.” When the underlying cause of death is simply unknown, stating that the etiology is unknown will avoid a query. (For further information, see <http://www.ohd.hr.state.or.us/cdsum/2001/ohd5007.pdf>. Remember, only you can prevent queries.)

5. Answer: (e) none of the above.

These are terminal or non-specific conditions that do not clearly indicate the type of underlying disease involved. We know you know (in most cases) the “underlying” conditions that precipitated the arrests, failures, and other mechanisms of death. By reporting them on the death certificate, you can avoid receiving a query from our office.

6. Answer: (b) cancer. In 2001, cancer beat out heart disease by 5 deaths to become the leading cause of death for the first time. See [http://www.ohd.hr.state.or.us/chs/cntydata/cdb2001/tbl19\\_01.pdf](http://www.ohd.hr.state.or.us/chs/cntydata/cdb2001/tbl19_01.pdf).

7. Answer: (e) humans. On average, 100+ Oregonians are murdered annually compared to just 2–3 fatally injured by horses, the second most common perpetrator.

8. Answer: (a) never. When signing death certificates, please check to make sure that your name, title, etc. is typed or written as the certifying physician. If it is not, please white out the information that is on all copies and print in the new information, or request that the funeral home re-do the certificate.

9. Answer: (c). By law, the only person who can change the medical portion of the death certificate is the physician/nurse practitioner who originally signed the death certificate. The State Medical Examiner can override a signer's decision, but this rarely occurs. Once registered, any change to a certificate must be made on an affidavit that is signed and dated. The person signing the affidavit must be the same person who signed the certificate. Affidavits are legal docu-

ments and become part of the vital records archives. A new certificate cannot simply be submitted with changes.

10. Answer: (e) none of the above. For detailed instructions on how to complete these items, see <http://www.ohd.hr.state.or.us/chs/dcinstructions.pdf>.

11. Answer: (c) overdoses/poisonings. In 2001, 513 persons died of overdoses/poisonings compared to 488 from motor vehicle traffic crashes. Yes, death by electrocution via nipple rings actually did happen.

12. Answer: (b) In cases where the manner of death is anything other than natural, the certifying physician should complete these items.

13. Answer: (e) all of the above. CHS Web site <http://www.ohd.hr.state.or.us/chs/deathcert.htm>. Call us at 503/731-4453. Email [Terrie.L.Bollinger@state.or.us](mailto:Terrie.L.Bollinger@state.or.us). Instructions for Completing the Cause-of-Death Section of the Death Certificate ([http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/misc/hb\\_cod.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/misc/hb_cod.pdf)). Possible Solutions to Common Problems in Death Certification (<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/about/major/dvs/brief.htm>).

#### SCORE

If you got 11–13 correct, you have genius-level death IQ and have a future as a Nosologist. 8–10, Above-average death IQ. You have great potential for an exciting career in public health. 5–7, Average death IQ. You should probably spend more time reading *CD Summaries*. 0–4, Below-average death IQ. You have died while reading this *CD Summary*. Boredom should be listed on your death certificate as the underlying cause of death.