

## SFHHPC11

### Conduct initial forensic medical assessment of an unexpected death



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#### Overview

This standard is about healthcare professionals providing verification and forensic assessment of unexpected deaths. This includes making a judgement when life is extinct based on observation of the person's vital signs, clarifying suspicious or non-suspicious circumstances and taking action to preserve any evidence which may be required for potential future investigations.

Users of this standard will need to ensure that practice reflects up to date information and policies.

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### Performance criteria

*You must be able to:*

- P1 identify yourself immediately on arrival to the police officer keeping the log
- P2 ensure it is safe to approach and take all possible steps to preserve the scene, potential forensic evidence and the health and safety of self and others, liaising with other professionals where relevant
- P3 put on gloves prior to any contact with the body
- P4 use protective clothing, overshoes and, if required, face mask when the scene is being treated as suspicious, and preserve these in an evidence bag when leaving the scene
- P5 prioritise preservation of life where there are any doubts that death has occurred
- P6 obtain relevant background information and details of the circumstances from other professionals e.g. from police officers
- P7 advise that another healthcare professional should be asked to confirm life extinct when a death occurs in police custody and you have previously provided the deceased person with healthcare whilst they have been in custody
- P8 assess the person's vital signs to determine whether or not death has occurred
- P9 when you have confirmed that life is extinct, record the time of this conclusion
- P10 confer with the investigation team to agree the further steps that are to be taken e.g. photography
- P11 survey the scene to observe any significant features e.g. blood stains, state of clothing, medication, drug paraphernalia, alcohol
- P12 look for any signs that may indicate the cause of death or which raise suspicions about the cause of death e.g. body fluids, injuries
- P13 arrange for the ambient room temperature to be taken and recorded (if required)
- P14 note factors which may provide an indication of the time of death e.g. body temperature and presence or absence of rigor mortis or hypostasis
- P15 note factors which may indicate whether the body has been moved after death
- P16 provide further advice and assistance to the police as required
- P17 make detailed records of the scene, condition of the body and related circumstances in accordance with legal, professional and organisational requirements and guidelines

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### Knowledge and understanding

*You need to know and understand:*

- K1 the combination of vital signs which may be used to confirm death extinct
- K2 the conditions and circumstances which may mimic death
- K3 how and when resuscitation should be attempted if there are doubts that death has occurred
- K4 why healthcare professionals who have previously provided a deceased person with health care in police custody would not normally confirm life extinct
- K5 features which should be noted and recorded to indicate the circumstances and cause of death
- K6 factors which may be used to estimate the time of death e.g.
  - K6.1 body temperature
  - K6.2 the presence or absence of rigor mortis or hypostasis
- K7 policies and protocols regarding deaths in police custody
- K8 the legal authorities which need to be informed of an unexpected death
- K9 how to preserve a scene to prevent contamination or destruction of potential evidence
- K10 the protective clothing that should be used for personal safety and to prevent contamination of evidence, and why this may need to be preserved
- K11 how to obtain background information about a situation from other professionals
- K12 how to communicate clearly and in ways that promote understanding
- K13 how to keep accurate, legible and complete records in accordance with legal, professional and organisational requirements and guidelines

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### Additional Information

#### External links

This standard links with the following dimension within the NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework (October 2004):

Dimension: IK2 Information collection and analysis

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<b>Developed by</b>	Skills for Health
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<b>Date approved</b>	June 2010
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<b>Originating organisation</b>	Skills for Health
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<b>Original URN</b>	HPC11
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<b>Relevant occupations</b>	Nursing and Subjects and Vocations Allied; Healthcare and Related Personal Services
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<b>Suite</b>	Police Custody
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<b>Key words</b>	Confirm, deaths, deceased, forensic, suspicious, unexpected, life extinct.
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