

# **Appendix C: The Standard Medical Certificate of Cause of Death**

## INTERNATIONAL FORM OF MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF CAUSE OF DEATH

CAUSE OF DEATH		Approximate interval between onset and death
<b>I</b>		
<i>Disease or condition directly leading to death*</i>	(a) ..... due to (or as a consequence of)	.....
<i>Antecedent causes</i>	(b) ..... due to (or as a consequence of)	.....
Morbid conditions, if any, giving rise to the above cause, stating the underlying condition last	(c) .....  due to (or as a consequence of)	.....
	(d) .....	.....
<b>II</b>		
<i>Other significant conditions contributing to the death, but not related to the disease or condition causing it</i>	.....	.....
* This means the disease, injury or complication which caused death NOT ONLY, for example, the mode of dying, such as "heart failure, asthenia" etc.	.....	.....

The Medical Certificate of Cause of Death is recommended by the World Health Organization for international use. This general format is used by all Australian states and territories although some local variations occur; for example an extra line, Part I (e), may appear on some forms.

# Glossary

***age-specific mortality rate:*** See Box 1.2, Chapter 1.

***age-specific rate:*** A rate for a specific age group. The numerator and denominator relate to the same age group.

***age standardisation:*** A method of removing the influence of age when comparing populations with different age structures.

***age-standardised mortality rate:*** See Box 1.3, Chapter 1.

***Alzheimer's disease:*** A condition (named after a German physician) in which there is progressive loss of brainpower shown by worsening short-term memory, confusion and disorientation. A form of *dementia*.

***angina:*** Temporary chest pain or discomfort when the heart's own blood supply is inadequate to meet extra needs. See also *circulatory disease*.

***associated cause(s) of death:*** Any condition(s) diseases or injuries – other than the *underlying cause* – contributing to death. See also *cause of death*.

***cancer:*** A range of diseases where some of the body's cells begin to multiply out of control, can invade and damage the area around them, and can also spread to other parts of the body to cause further damage.

***cause of death:*** From information reported on the medical certificate of cause of death, each death is classified by the underlying cause of death according to rules and conventions of the prevailing International Classification of Diseases edition. The underlying cause is defined as the disease which initiated the train of events leading directly to death. Deaths from injury or poisoning are classified according to the circumstances of the violence which produced the fatal injury, rather than to the nature of the injury.

***cerebrovascular disease:*** any disorder of the blood vessels supplying the brain or its covering membranes. See also *stroke*.

***chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD):*** A combination of emphysema and chronic bronchitis-related conditions, where damage to the lungs obstructs oxygen intake and causes shortness of breath.

***circulatory disease:*** Any disease of the heart or blood vessels, including *heart attack*, *angina*, *stroke* and peripheral vascular disease. Also known as cardiovascular disease.

***colorectal cancer:*** Cancer of the colon (the lower 1.5 to 2 metres of the intestine) or of the rectum (the final 15 cm at the end of the colon, ending with the anus).

***congenital:*** A condition that is recognised at birth, or that is believed to have been present since birth, including conditions which are inherited or caused by environmental factors.

**coronary heart disease:** See *ischaemic heart disease*.

**crude mortality rate:** The number of deaths in a year divided by the number in the corresponding population.

**dementia:** A general and worsening loss of brain power such as memory, understanding and reasoning.

**epidemiology:** The study of the patterns and causes of health and disease in populations, and the application of this study to improve health.

**expectation of life:** See *life expectancy*.

**external cause:** Environmental event, circumstance and/or condition as the cause of injury, poisoning and/or other adverse effect. This term is used in disease classification.

**health promotion:** Activities to improve health and prevent disease.

**health status:** An individual's or population's overall level of health, taking account of various aspects such as life expectancy, amount of disability, levels of disease risk factors and so forth.

**heart attack:** Emergency illness that occurs when a vessel supplying blood to the heart muscle is suddenly blocked completely by a blood clot. The medical term commonly used for a heart attack is *myocardial infarction*. See also *circulatory disease*.

**heart failure:** When the heart cannot pump strongly enough to keep the blood circulating around the body at adequate rate.

**hepatitis:** Inflammation of the liver, which can be due to certain viral infections, alcohol excess or a range of other causes.

**immunisation:** Inducing immunity against infection by the use of an antigen to stimulate the body to produce its own antibodies. See *vaccination*.

**incidence:** The number of new cases (of an illness or event, etc.) occurring during a given period. Compare with *prevalence*.

**infectious and parasitic diseases:** Infectious diseases include infectious conditions such as tuberculosis, polio, smallpox, hepatitis, and sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis and HIV/AIDS. It does not include influenza, which is listed in the respiratory chapter.

**injury and poisoning:** Injury and poisoning include deaths from motor vehicle and industrial accidents, suicide, assault, and accidents such as poisoning, drowning, burns, falls and complications from medical and surgical care.

**International Classification of Diseases (ICD):** The World Health Organization's internationally accepted classification of death and disease. For each period in this study the prevailing edition of the ICD was used to classify conditions.

**ischaemia:** Reduced or blocked blood supply. See also *ischaemic heart disease*.

**ischaemic heart disease:** *Heart attack* and *angina* (chest pain). Also known as coronary heart disease.

**life expectancy:** An indication of how long a person can expect to live. Technically it is the number of years of life remaining to a person at a particular age if death rates do not change.

**malignancy:** See *cancer*.

**mammogram:** X-ray of the breast. May be used to assess a breast lump or as a screening test in women with no evidence of cancer.

**mental disorder:** A disturbance of mood or thought that can affect behaviour and distress the person or those around them, so the person cannot function normally. It includes anxiety disorders, depression and schizophrenia.

**myocardial infarction:** Term still commonly used to mean a *heart attack*, but more correctly refers only to those heart attacks which have caused some death of heart muscle.

**neonatal:** Within 28 days of birth.

**perinatal:** Pertaining to or occurring in the period shortly before or after birth (usually 28 days).

**prevalence:** The number or proportion (of cases, instances, etc.) present in a population at a given time. Compare with *incidence*.

**prevention (of disease):** Action to reduce or eliminate the onset, causes, complications or recurrence of disease.

**prostate cancer:** Cancer of the prostate, the male organ that sits next to the urinary bladder and contributes to the semen (sperm fluid).

**puerperium:** The period which elapses after the birth of a child until the mother is again restored to her ordinary condition.

**public health:** Health activities which aim to benefit a population. Prevention, protection and promotion of health are emphasised, as distinct from treatment tailored to individuals with symptoms. Examples include provision of a clean water supply and good sewerage, conduct of anti-smoking education campaigns and screening for diseases such as cancers of the breast and cervix.

**respiratory diseases:** Diseases that affect the lung and other organs and tissues associated with breathing. Include influenza, pneumonia, bronchitis, asthma, other chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases, as well as other lung diseases such as those caused by dusts and asbestos. Cancers of the lung or respiratory system are not included.

**risk factor:** Any factor which represents a greater risk of a health disorder or other unwanted condition. Some risk factors are regarded as causes of disease, others are not necessarily so.

**stroke:** When an artery supplying blood to the brain suddenly becomes blocked or bleeds, often causing paralysis of parts of the body or speech problems. An example of *cerebrovascular disease*

**substance use disorders:** Result from harmful use and/or dependence on illicit or licit drugs, including alcohol, tobacco and prescription drugs.

**suicide:** Deliberately ending one's own life.

**tuberculosis:** A bacterial disease that affects the lungs especially, with serious fever-like symptoms and destruction of tissue. It can spread to other parts of the body, causing secondary problems and often death if not treated.

**underlying cause of death:** The condition, disease or injury initiating the sequence of events leading to death; that is, the primary, chief, main or principal cause. Compare with *associated cause(s) of death*.

**vaccination:** The process of administering a vaccine to a person to produce immunity against infection. See *immunisation*.

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