

# Next steps: When a loved one dies in hospital

Kingston Health  
Sciences Centre

Centre des sciences de  
la santé de Kingston



Hôpital  
Hotel Dieu  
Hospital

**KGH**

Hôpital Général de  
Kingston General  
Hospital

## Table of Contents:

Contact information .....	3
Disclaimer .....	3
When someone you know has died .....	4
Caring for yourself and others .....	4
At the hospital .....	5
Organ and tissue donation .....	7
Donating a body to science .....	8
Funeral arrangements .....	11
After the funeral.....	12
List of common notifications after a death .....	13
Legal issues .....	15
Definitions .....	15

## Contact information

- Admitting: 613-549-6666 ext.1221
- Security: 613-549-6666 ext. 4218
- Spiritual Care: please speak with a member of the healthcare team to contact a spiritual health practitioner, who is available 24/7 for urgent concerns.
- Social Work: 613-549-6666 ext. 7772. Social Work is not a 24/7 service but will aim to respond as soon as possible.
- Patient Relations: 613-549-6666 ext. 4158 or toll free at 1-800-567-5722 ext.4158 [PatientRelations@KingstonHSC.ca](mailto:PatientRelations@KingstonHSC.ca). Monday to Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., excluding statutory holidays.
- Release of Information Office: at 613-549-6666 ext. 6800 [khscroirequest@khsc.ca](mailto:khscroirequest@khsc.ca), Monday to Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- Regional Supervising Coroner's Office: 613-544-1596 or [OCC.Kingston@Ontario.ca](mailto:OCC.Kingston@Ontario.ca)

## Disclaimer

Although every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, readers are strongly advised to consult with the appropriate professional as the information in this guidebook is not intended to be a substitute for medical, legal, or financial advice from a qualified professional.

## **When someone you know has died**

The death of a family member or friend is one of the most stressful things we experience in life. We can have many emotions in our first hours of grief.

When a death is sudden or unexpected, the shock can feel overwhelming. Even when a death is expected, it is difficult to feel prepared. These feelings are normal.

After a death, there are decisions and plans you need to make in a short amount of time. This booklet provides an overview of what happens next. It also outlines some of the things you need to think about over the next few hours and days. It is our hope that this information will help you during your difficult time.

For religious, spiritual, and cultural requests, please ask a member of the health care team to contact a spiritual health practitioner.

## **Caring for yourself and others**

Grief is a normal human response to a loss. Each person grieves in their own way and time. The way we grieve is shaped by our personality, life experience, culture, and religious and spiritual beliefs. When you're grieving, you experience many different thoughts and feelings.

### **Talking to children about loss**

Children can experience the same emotions as adults but may not understand or have the words to describe what they are feeling. Children of different ages have different levels of understanding about death. Children need honest and clear answers to their questions about death and grief. You will not have all the answers, but you can provide simple details, reassurance, and love to a child. Be open-minded and available.

Many community resources are available to help you including hospital social workers. To contact a hospital social worker, please refer to the contact information section of this booklet.

### **Your own well-being**

During this difficult time, it is important to take care of yourself. Remember that family, friends, staff at the hospital and other community support groups are available to help you. You may also want to see a medical professional for advice and help.

Don't be afraid to ask for help. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness. It takes courage and strength to ask for help.

## Bereavement support services

You can access support through your family, friends, hospital, and religious or cultural community. We encourage you to use this support to help you through this difficult time. There are also many bereavement support services in your community that you may use. You can seek this support in your own time.

Many local funeral homes and crematoriums provide or sponsor bereavement support services. Please ask the funeral home or crematorium about their support services, which may include useful brochures, group meetings or special events.

You can find a list of organizations that provide bereavement support services through Southeast Health Line at [www.southeasthealthline.ca](http://www.southeasthealthline.ca).

Public libraries, local faith communities, support groups, bookstores, schools and hospitals have a wide variety of books and other resources for adults, teenagers and children who are grieving. Online support groups and resources are available and can be accessed 24 hours a day.

## At the hospital

### What Happens When Someone Dies in the Hospital?

When someone dies in the hospital, several steps must be taken to meet legal requirements and prepare the body to move to a funeral home. Here is what you can expect:

1. A doctor will confirm the death.
2. Nurses will remove medical equipment from your loved one's body and the room. Sometimes, medical equipment must stay with the body to help experts determine how or why they died.
3. When possible, you will be given the opportunity to spend time with your loved one in their hospital room.
4. Ordinarily, the body will then be taken to the morgue at Kingston General Hospital site (KGH). Exceptions can be made for religious or cultural reasons.
5. A funeral home or crematorium is the most appropriate place to view your loved one's body and is open 24/7. The hospital morgue is not resourced to provide family viewings. There are limited circumstances in which family may be allowed to see their loved one in the hospital morgue viewing room. In most cases, the body will be moved directly to a funeral home or crematorium from the hospital.

## Who can claim a body?

When there is a will:

If the person who died had a will, that document names an executor. The executor would have the responsibility to make funeral arrangements (claiming the body).

When there isn't a will:

There is a difference between taking on legal responsibility of an individual's estate when there isn't a will and taking on responsibility for making arrangements for the body (becoming a "claimant"). When there isn't a will, a funeral service provider has the responsibility to ask people contacting them to begin arrangements several questions to determine if they are the most appropriate possible claimant. These questions will be about the person contacting them (for example: "What is your connection or relationship to the person who died?") and about the social contacts of the person who died (for example: "Were they married?", "Did they have adult children?").

If you wonder if you can be a claimant, you can consult a funeral service provider. The hospital does not participate in this process. Determining a claimant is a funeral service provider responsibility under legislation.

Once funeral arrangements have been made the executor (or claimant) needs to inform Admitting (613-549-6666 ext.1221).

## Who can help me?

You may find that you have questions or concerns in what could be a stressful time following a death. There are staff at the hospital who will be available to help. You can find the contact information at the beginning of this document.

### Patient Relations

Patient Relations can facilitate connecting you with the appropriate medical professionals. Questions or feedback related to your experience or care provided at Kingston Health Sciences Centre (KHSC) can be submitted to Patient Relations by phone or email.

### Social Worker

Social workers can help you cope with death, family issues and emotions by providing counselling. Social workers can also help you get in touch with community groups that offer support to people dealing with death and grief.

If you want to talk to a social worker, ask a member of the healthcare team. You can also call the Social Work office directly.

## Spiritual Care

Spiritual health practitioners are available to provide spiritual care support to patients and families. They can provide empathy and a caring presence as you talk about your grief emotions. Spiritual health practitioners can also help you connect with religious and cultural supports of your choosing outside of the hospital.

## Patient Records

Request medical records from the Release of Information Office by phone or email.



Scan this QR code or visit [www.kingstonhsc.ca/PHI](http://www.kingstonhsc.ca/PHI) to learn more about accessing your health information, associated fees and the schedule for release (which could take up to 30 business days).

## Organ and tissue donation

Everyone is encouraged to talk to family and friends about donating their organs or tissues (body parts) after death.

A coordinator from Ontario Health (Trillium Gift of Life Network) may speak to you about donating organs or tissues after death. One organ donor can help save the lives of eight others through organ donation and enhance the lives of 75 people through the gift of tissue donation. Donation of organs can help in providing lifesaving medical treatment to other patients in need.

If you have questions before a coordinator meets with you, then please let the nurses or doctors at the hospital know and they will connect you with a coordinator who can help answer any questions that you have.

Organ and tissue donation may not always be possible, as it can depend on various factors.

Information is also available online at [www.giftoflife.on.ca](http://www.giftoflife.on.ca).

While organ and tissue donation does involve surgery, the deceased's body can be prepared for a private or public viewing at the funeral home.

## Donating a body to science

This is a two-step process between an individual/family and the Queens Department of Biomedical and Molecular Sciences. The hospital is not involved and does not have an active role in these arrangements.

1. Prior to death:

For individuals who have the wish for their remains to be donated to science after their death, it works best if these arrangements have been started in advance of a death.

2. At the time of death:

Queen's University will need to make a determination that they are able to accept the remains based on criteria. The executor or claimant must call the Department of Biomedical and Molecular Sciences at 613-533-2600.

If the body is accepted by the Department of Biomedical and Molecular Sciences, then the executor or claimant is required to make arrangements for transportation to Queen's through a funeral service provider and then notify Admitting (613-549-6666 ext. 1221).



Scan this QR code for more information about the Queen's University Human Body Donor Program.

## Autopsy

An autopsy is an examination of the body that helps us understand how or why someone died. There are times when an autopsy is optional, and times when it is required.

In most cases you will be asked to decide if you want your family member or friend to have an autopsy. In some cases, the law or a coroner will require that your family member or friend have an autopsy.

When there is an autopsy, it may mean the deceased's body cannot go to the funeral home or crematorium immediately. The coroner or a member of the healthcare team will talk to you and answer your questions if an autopsy is required.

Although an autopsy involves some surgery, the deceased's body can usually be prepared for private or public viewing at the funeral home.

Specially trained doctors called pathologists perform autopsies. These doctors are experts in how diseases change and affect the body.



The results of an autopsy are summarized in an autopsy report. It can take weeks or months before an autopsy report is available. Autopsy reports are usually given to the deceased's family doctor for discussion with you. If a coroner asks for an autopsy, they will discuss the autopsy results with you directly.

## **The coroner**

In specific circumstances, the nurses or doctors must notify a coroner when a person dies in the hospital.

The coroner's role is to investigate specific deaths, mainly non-natural deaths, and to do that, they will need to discuss the circumstances of the death with the family, as well as the doctors who were involved in the medical care.

A coroner may decide that an autopsy is needed. When a coroner requires an autopsy, the deceased's body will not be released to the funeral home or crematorium immediately. This usually will be possible a few days later.

The coroner will talk to you and answer your questions about the investigation and the autopsy results if one is required.

## **Documentation and paperwork**

1. When a person dies in the hospital, their doctor signs a Medical Certificate of Death, which is given to the funeral home or crematorium.
2. The funeral home or crematorium produces a Statement of Death, a legal document used to settle the business affairs of the deceased. Copies of the Statement of Death will be provided to the claimant of the deceased. These are needed as part of the process to settle the deceased's affairs.
3. The funeral home or crematorium submits the Medical Certificate of Death and the Statement of Death to the local municipal clerk's office. It may take up to 12 weeks (about 3 months) for a death to be registered in Ontario.
4. You can apply for a death certificate through Service Ontario online, in person or by mail. A certified copy of death registration with cause of death information can be obtained in person or by mail.

## Personal Belongings

If the power of attorney or executor is present at the time of death, they will be asked to take the personal belongings with them. Please take any unused medication to a local pharmacy for proper disposal. If the power of attorney or executor is not available at the time of death, personal belongings will be collected and stored safely by KHSC staff until they are released to a funeral home or crematorium and transported with the body. By exception, there is an option for executors to pick up belongings directly from KHSC.

Executors must call Admitting and must produce a will and photo ID to claim belongings. Admitting is located in Armstrong 1 of the KGH Site.

## Release of information

### Obtaining a copy of the health information of a deceased individual

If you are requesting a copy of the hospital record of a patient that is deceased, contact the Release of Information office. You need to fill out the Request for Access to Personal Health Record form available at [kingstonhsc.ca/PHI](http://kingstonhsc.ca/PHI), or by scanning the QR code below.

Please submit your completed form along with one of the following:

- A document listing you as an executor (copy of the will)
- An official, legal, “certificate of appointment of estate trustee without a will”
- Consent signed by the above to release the information to you

Requests are processed within 30 days. Please note there is an associated fee.

Submit your information and the completed form to:

Release of Information  
Kingston Health Sciences Centre  
166 Brock St., Kingston, ON K7L 5G2  
Phone: 613-549-6666 ext. 6800  
Fax: 613-542-8071  
Email: [khscrequest@kingstonhsc.ca](mailto:khscrequest@kingstonhsc.ca)



## **Funeral arrangements**

If there are pre-existing arrangements, it is your responsibility to contact the funeral home or crematorium to let them know that the death has happened and to then advise Admitting (613-549-6666 ext.1221) of the name of the service provider.

### **If you need financial help:**

It is important to contact all the organizations that can help you financially before you make funeral or cremation arrangements. Many funeral homes and crematoriums can arrange for payment of funeral or cremation services over time if finances are a problem.

### **Municipal funding**

Financial assistance may be available through municipal social services. You must apply and receive approval for funding prior to signing a contract with a funeral home or crematorium, otherwise you will be financially responsible.

You can look in your local telephone listings or call your municipal or county government office to find the municipal social services office nearest you. You can also ask to speak to a social worker at the hospital.

### **Other potential financial supports**

You may be eligible for financial help from a union, society, lodge, or other associations that your loved one belonged to during their lifetime.

### **Public Guardian and Trustee**

If a public guardian and trustee looked after the finances of your loved one, the trustee is responsible for making sure there is money to pay for the funeral or cremation. Call the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee at 1-800-891-0506 for information. You will need your loved one's full name and the public guardian and trustee file number or other identification.

### **Choosing a funeral home or crematorium**

There are many choices for planning a funeral, memorial, burial, or cremation. You can contact funeral homes, crematoriums, and cemeteries by phone. All provide a 24-hour phone service and can arrange to meet with you at your convenience. To find funeral homes and crematoriums in your area, look online or in your local telephone book.

The cost of funeral homes, cremation services and cemeteries vary. You may want to compare prices. Ask funeral homes and crematoriums what services are included in their price, including whether they have a license to offer viewings. If you live outside Kingston, ask how much it will cost to transport the body. After you choose a funeral home or crematorium, the staff there can help you make further plans.

When you meet with the staff at the funeral home or crematorium, you need to bring some information about your loved one, including:

- Social Insurance Number
- date and place of birth
- marital status
- names of parents, partner or spouse, and children

### **Out-of-town Family**

Some airlines offer discounted fares for travel related to the death of a family member. Information is available on the airline websites. Documentation will be required.

### **After the funeral**

If you are the executor or administrator of the estate, there are many personal and legal matters to be handled.

You will need to ensure you have the following information of the deceased:

- name
- Social Insurance Number
- Old Age Security number
- date of death
- family information

## List of common notifications after a death

The following list includes the most common notifications required after a death:

### Government

- SIN Card
  - Mail SIN card and Proof of Death Certificate
- Canada Pension Plan (CPP)
  - 3 types of benefits
    - Death Benefit- one-time payment to estate for funeral expenses
    - Survivor Benefit- monthly pension paid to the spouse of the contributor
    - Child Allowance- monthly allowance paid to all children of the contributor
  - Call Service Canada or visit a Service Canada location to apply
- Passport Office
  - Mail the passport and Proof of Death Certificate
- Citizenship & Immigration
  - Call to cancel citizenship card/permanent residence card
- Canada Revenue Agency
  - Cancel benefit payments in the name of your loved one. Some benefits may require the Proof of Death Certificate
- Veterans Affairs
  - Call to cancel benefit payments in the name of your loved one.
  - Apply to the Last Post fund for financial support with funeral costs
- Income Tax
  - Include the Proof of Death Certificate when filing the final return
- OHIP
  - Return card with Proof of Death Certificate to a Service Ontario office
- Driver's License
  - Bring the card and a completed Application for Refund of Driver's License to a Service Ontario office
- Vehicle ownership
  - Attend Service Ontario with Proof of Death Certificate, copies of the will and vehicle ownership

## Insurance

- contact the insurance company as soon as possible. They will send forms to process the claim. They require the Proof of Death Certificate
  - Contact Life Insurance company if applicable
  - Contact Employment/Pension Insurance company if applicable
  - If your loved one is named as beneficiary on your policy remember to change it to someone else

## Financial Institutions

- Accounts (Bank, Credit Card & Investments) held solely in the name of the deceased may be frozen
  - You may be advised to set up an estate account to manage deposits and bills
  - Outstanding balances on credit cards must be paid
  - Destroy all cancelled cards
- Safe Deposit Box
  - Can only be opened by the persons named executor in the will.
  - Bring the Proof of Death Certificate and copy of the will
- Mortgages and Loans
  - If life insured, outstanding payments will stop
  - If not insured, payments will continue to be withdrawn
- Investments
  - Make an appointment with the financial advisor
  - If your loved one is named as beneficiary to your investments remember to change it to someone else

## General Housekeeping

- Rental property/leases
  - May need to be modified or cancelled
- Cable
- Telephone
- Internet
- Utility companies
  - Gas, Hydro, Water
- Magazines/newspaper subscriptions
- Club/organizational memberships
- Social Media Accounts

## Legal issues

A lawyer can help you or the executors of the estate fulfill the legal will and wishes. Even if you are the sole beneficiary of the estate and their property can be transferred to you without legal documentation, it is recommended that you contact a lawyer for their professional advice.

## Definitions

- **Autopsy** – an examination of the body that helps us understand how or why someone died.
- **Claimant** – a person or organization that is prepared to assume responsibility for the disposition of the deceased person's body, such as a relative, friend, colleague, neighbour, charitable organization or religious institution.
- **Coroner** – an official responsible for discussing the circumstances of a person's death with the family doctor and specialists who provided their medical care.
- **Executor** – a person who is legally responsible for handling the deceased's possessions and estate.
- **Medical Certificate of Death** – a document containing the details of a death that took place in Ontario. This is required for real estate and property transactions and may be required to claim pension and insurance benefits.
- **Pathologist** – physician who specializes in how diseases change and affect the body.
- **Power of Attorney (POA)** – legal authorization for a designated person to make decisions about another person's property, finances, or medical care.
- **Public Guardian and Trustee** – a representative of the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee assigned to safeguard the legal, personal, and financial interests of an individual or estate.
- **Statement of Death** – proof of death issued by a funeral director.
- **Substitute Decision Maker (SDM)** – a person who is authorized to give or refuse consent to treatment, admission to a care facility, or personal assistant services, on behalf of an incapable individual.

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76 Stuart St., Kingston, ON, Canada K7L 2V7  
Tel: 613.549.6666 [www.KingstonHSC.ca](http://www.KingstonHSC.ca)

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