



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Health

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STATE HEALTH COMMISSIONER

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Dear Funeral Service Provider,

Thank you for the comfort and guidance you provide to all Virginians during a most difficult and trying time. We appreciate those who have voiced their concerns about acquiring completed death certificates for the some 50,000 natural deaths that occur in Virginia each year. In conjunction with the Virginia Department of Health Professions (DHP), the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) has developed a plan to address these concerns by improving the death certification process. You may have recently received a letter – our first step – outlining the details of our plan, which include the following.

- **Online course:**
 - “Death Certification: Your Final Act of Patient Care”

- **Correspondence:**
 - Clinicians’ Letter reviewing the purpose of Death Certification in Virginia to **114,604 clinicians** representing a range of occupational groups such as physicians, interns and residents, licensed practical nurses, and physician assistants; **14 statewide provider associations** including the College of Emergency Physicians and the Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association; and to **6 public health offices** such as the Office of Emergency Medical Services and the Medical Reserve Corps

 - Letter to Virginia’s **3 funeral director associations** and their memberships to raise awareness of our efforts and offer resources and information on the process

 - Letter to deans of Virginia’s five medical schools as an effort to reach out to the **4,266 medical students and residents**

- **Information and Resources:**
 - Reference sheets for funeral directors and physicians

 - Training to all local health district directors

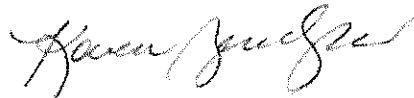
The plan is designed to share information and resources with physicians and other health care professionals in order to further their understanding of the purpose and importance of completing and signing death certificates in a timely manner. A link to the online training module was listed in the Clinicians' Letter mentioned above. You may also view the course by going to: <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/clinicians/>.

All local health district directors continue to be a community resource for questions or concerns regarding the details of completing a death certificate. The directors have recently received additional training and are available 24/7 as a point of contact for the physicians in their local communities.

If you have any pertinent information surrounding the circumstances of the death, be sure to promptly communicate these details with the physician in charge of signing the death certificate. In some instances you may be able to speed the process along by providing such information as the date, time and place of death that are unknown to the physician. VDH will work in conjunction with the funeral directors associations to create an information sheet that the directors can use as a tool to provide details of the death to the physician in charge of signing the death certificate.

Thank you for your patience and support of this initiative. VDH has developed a methodology to assess the effectiveness of our efforts and any input would be greatly appreciated. You may contact the Clinical Liaison, Amber Gray, at (804) 864-7263 or amber.gray@vdh.virginia.gov with any comments, questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



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Commissioner, Virginia Department of Health



Dianne L. Reynolds-Cane, MD
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