

## Autopsy Information

An autopsy may be done after the loss of a loved one. Here are some questions people ask about an autopsy.

### **What is an autopsy?**

It is an exam of the inside and outside of a person's body who has died. There are two types of autopsies: a complete autopsy or a limited autopsy. A complete autopsy is done on the whole body. A limited autopsy is done on specific parts of the body. For example, a limited autopsy could be of the chest only, or everything but the brain.

### **Will an autopsy affect any funeral plans or funeral home care?**

An autopsy can affect funeral plans. We will do everything possible to lessen this delay. If the Medical Examiner requests the autopsy, there may be a longer delay in releasing the body. Please tell the Medical Examiner or the hospital the funeral home you have chosen.

### **Who does the autopsy?**

A doctor who studies the effects of disease does the autopsy. This doctor is called a pathologist.

### **Why are autopsies asked for?**

Autopsies are done to:

- Find out the cause of death.
- Answer questions about a disease.
- Get tissues for research.

### **Who can ask for an autopsy?**

- The doctor
- The Medical Examiner's office
- The family

### **How do you ask for an autopsy?**

There must be a doctor's order for an autopsy to be done at Bronson. There is also an autopsy consent form. This form should be filled out by the next of kin (closest living relatives.) The patient advocate and guardian decision makers cannot sign the form. Their right to make decisions ends when your loved one dies.

Sometimes the family wants an autopsy but the doctor does not think it needs to be done. Family requested or private autopsies are not done at Bronson. No order is needed from a doctor for you to request a private autopsy. You will need to have the body transferred and will be responsible for all costs. You may call WMED Pathology at (844-337-6001, ext. 112) for more information.

### **Who pays for an autopsy?**

- If the doctor orders an autopsy for a Bronson patient, the family won't be charged.
- If the Medical Examiner requests an autopsy, the costs are covered by the county where the person expired.
- If the family requests an autopsy (private), the family must arrange and pay for the autopsy. Bronson will not cover the charges.
  - It is up to the family to make the plans and payment for the autopsy.
  - The autopsy cannot be done at Bronson.
  - The family will have to pay for transportation costs, physician fees and any other fees.

### **Where does the autopsy take place?**

Autopsies are done at WMU-Homer Stryker School of Medicine in Kalamazoo. Both medical examiner and Bronson ordered autopsies are done at the school of medicine. Only intrauterine fetal deaths and still born infants will be done at Bronson.

### **When are autopsies done?**

They are done Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. They are not done on holidays. The autopsy will not take place until the next day if the body goes to the morgue after 1 p.m.

### **How long does an autopsy take?**

It takes about 2-3 hours.

### **When will I know what the autopsy shows?**

The final report will be available within 30-60 working days of the autopsy. Reports will be sent to the ordering doctor.

If the autopsy is done through the Medical Examiner's office, or outside of Bronson, the results can take up to 3 months. Please contact the Medical Examiner's office for results (269) 337-6173.

### **Are autopsy results confidential?**

Autopsy reports completed at Bronson are private. They are part of the patient's medical record. The next of kin can request medical records.

Autopsy results are public record if requested by the Medical Examiner's office. A copy can be requested from the Office of the Medical Examiner at (269) 337-6173. There may be charges for copies of the report.

### **What about medical examiner cases?**

Certain deaths must be reported to the County Medical Examiner's office. Sometimes the Medical Examiner may choose to order an autopsy for legal purposes. When this happens, Bronson has no control over the autopsy.