

Instructions for the District of Columbia's Registrar: Compliance with the Death with Dignity Act of 2016

The Death with Dignity Act of 2016 ("Act"), D.C. Official Code § 7-661.01 *et seq.*) states that "...the patient's death certificate shall identify the qualified patient's underlying medical condition consistent with the International Classification of Diseases without reference to the fact that the qualified patient ingested a covered medication."

According to the Act, "Actions taken in accordance with this act do not constitute suicide, assisted suicide, mercy killing, or homicide."

To ensure compliance with the strict requirements of the Act:

1. Carefully review the cause-of-death section of **every** death record. Look for any language that may indicate that the decedent used the Act.
2. The following terms should not be included in the death record:
 - a. Suicide
 - b. Assisted suicide
 - c. PAS (Physician-assisted suicide)
 - d. DWD(Death with Dignity)
 - e. Mercy killing
 - f. Homicide
 - g. Euthanasia
 - h. MAID (medical assistance in dying OR medically assisted dying)
 - i. Legally Prescribed/Legal Prescription
 - j. Physician-assisted dying
 - k. Any reference to medications covered by this legislation
 - l. Also any reference to the Act, applicable as of June 6, 2017.
3. If the cause-of-death section contains any of the above terms (or any other language that may indicate use of the Act), **DO NOT SIGN** (or electronically approve) the certificate. Email the Vital Records Division at vital.helpdesk@dc.gov for guidance on how to proceed.
4. The terms Secobarbital, Seconal, Pentobarbital, and Nembutal may indicate use of the Act. If the cause-of-death section lists any of these terms email the Vital Records Division at vital.helpdesk@dc.gov for guidance on how to proceed.

If the Department of Health concludes that the death record contains any language that violates the Act, you will be required to reject the record and obtain a correction before issuing a burial-transit permit or certified record to the Funeral Director.¹

¹ Under District law, the Registrar of the Department of Health Vital Records Division has the authority to develop and distribute forms or other means of transmitting data to carry out its purposes. The Registrar also has authority to require information needed to complete a vital record, including death records.