Orlando Strong
Vital Statistics At Work During Crisis

Vital Statistics recognizes Lamont Riddick, Chief Deputy Registrar at the Florida Department of Health in Orange County (FDOH—Orange), who was instrumental in coordinating efforts between state agencies, hospitals, funeral homes, social security, law enforcement, as well as the District 9 Medical Examiner’s office and Florida Emergency Mortuary Operations Response System during the tragedy at the Pulse Night Club in Orlando.

Lamont has been with FDOH-Orange for seven years, and has been the Chief Deputy Registrar responsible for the day to day operations of the vital statistics office for 5 1/2 years.

Lamont says, “During this time the thing that he is so grateful for is the help and support that he received from the state office.”

Thank you, Lamont, for your excellent work and a job well done.
Completing the death certificate is one of the last things a physician can do in caring for the patient. Without a death certificate families cannot proceed with some very important business such as closing estates, filing insurance claims, social security benefits, veteran’s benefits and/or retirement benefits. The death certificate is also an important public health monitoring tool.

Who should sign the death certificate?

- A primary or attending physician who treated the decedent through examination, medical advice or medication (even if not physically seen) during the 12 months preceding the date of death is the most knowledgeable about the decedent and should sign the death certificate. Chapter 382.008(3), Florida Statutes.

- In some cases, the physician in charge of the decedent’s care for the illness or condition that resulted in death, or by the physician in attendance either at the time of death or immediately before or after is also qualified to sign. A physician covering for an absent colleague who has access to the patient’s medical records is able and qualified to sign. (Just as you would treat a colleague’s patient, you are responsible for signing the death certificate he/she would sign.)

- If the patient dies at home, and has been seen by a physician within the last twelve 12 months, it is considered an attended death even if you were not at bedside. A death at home does not automatically fall within the jurisdiction of the medical examiner’s office.

Refusing to sign could incur the following penalties:

- Misdemeanor of the 2nd degree. Chapter 382.026(8), Florida Statutes.

- Fines from $1,000 to $10,000. Chapter 382.026(9) Florida Statutes and Florida Administrative Code, Rule 64B8-8.001(2)(g).


Within 72 hours after receipt of a death certificate, the medical certification of cause of death shall be completed and made available to the funeral director by the physician. Chapter 382.008(3), Florida Statutes.

Florida Administrative Code Chapter 64V-1.0061(3) states that a physician’s signature and statement as to the cause of death does not constitute prima facie proof of the cause of death. Terms such as “Probable” and “Possible” are acceptable terms preceding causes of death.

As a physician you have a statutory obligation to sign the death certificate. Signing a death certificate does not infer that the death is the fault of the physician certifying the death. You are merely completing a legally obligated last act of patient care.


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The REAL ID Act became effective nationwide on May 11, 2008. Florida began issuing REAL ID compliant credentials after January 1, 2010. A star in the upper right corner of the card indicates that the individual is REAL ID compliant. REAL ID is a nationwide effort to improve the integrity and security of state-issued driver licenses and identification cards, which in turn will help fight terrorism and reduce identity fraud. In order to get a REAL ID individuals would need to submit the following primary documents to establish identity, proof of legal residence and date of birth:

For U.S. Citizens:

- Valid, unexpired U.S. passport or certified copy of a birth certificate*.
- Social Security Card or proof of your Social Security number
- Two documents that show the applicant’s principal residence.

*Through a partnership with the Bureau of Vital Statistics there are currently 105 Driver License/Tax Collector offices within 35 counties in Florida that are able to issue certified copies of birth certificates. Since the inception of the Birth Issuance Program in 2012, approximately 85,000 birth certificates have been issued. Note: Not all county tax collectors are participating in the birth issuance program at this time. See implementation map below.

For a detailed list of required items, please visit www.gathergoget.com.

For more information regarding the Real ID Act: http://www.flhsmv.gov/realid/index.html
WHAT’S NEW?

Quick snippets regarding current or up-coming projects

- Vital Statistics expects to move away from our current Citrix-based platform to a new HTML5 platform within the next 12-18 months. We expect the changes in platform to greatly enhance the usability, and functionality for our users.

- Vital Statistics will be coordinating activities with District Medical Examiner Offices to help further improve the collection of specified drugs related to deaths associated with poisoning by drugs. The project will be a 1 1/2 year study that is conducted through a grant with the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) to further enhance the data collection of specific drugs.

- Vital Statistics is excited to be working with the Florida Clerks of Court regarding electronically transmitting documents such as marriage amendments, Legal Changes of Name, Adoptions, Paternity Orders, TPR (Termination of Parental Rights), and Children in Common, through their e-portal system. E-portal will help ensure the timely, and accurate filing of amendment information coming from the Clerks of Courts. Vital Statistics is also currently working with the Clerks of Court on electronically transferring marriages and dissolution of marriage data, thus eliminating the need for paper records.

- Vital Statistics recently partnered with the Veterans Administration in the development of a brochure that discusses how families may benefit when the death record properly shows the Service-Connected Disability that contributed to the decedent’s death. To get a copy of the VA Service Connected Disability brochure, contact the Bureau of Vital Statistics, or the Veterans Administration. For an informational brochure click here.

- Vital Statistics is currently developing a presentation to be used in medical residency programs throughout the state. The program will familiarize the medical student with what their obligation will be to sign the death certificate once they become a Florida physician.