

Dealing with an Expected Death at Home (Panama City and the Coronado Beach Area)

Caring for someone who is imminently dying is a very personal and intimate experience. It can also be a time when caregivers become overwhelmed with the practical tasks that need to be completed as death approaches. Panama Hospice and Respite Foundation (PHRF) has prepared this information to guide people in our community with the tasks that should be completed prior to the death and the usual procedure that happens after the death has occurred.

In an "expected death" the health care team has given the opinion that the person is irreparably terminal and there is no available treatment to restore health.

In an expected death at home, the team caring for the person, including the doctor usually supports the decision of end of life care in the home. The relationship between you and the physician is very important to insure that the person you are caring for gets the type of end stage care that you have decided is best for your situation. You, and the person you are caring for, not Panama Hospice and Respite, must communicate your wishes to the health care team. Once the decision has been made that the person will stay at home to die, there are some things that you can do to relieve some of the stress and confusion that may occur at the time of death.

- Compile the information you will need for the death certificate in Panama. This will include the name as it appears on the passport, or cédula. The number of the passport, or cédula and social security number. The marital status, birth date, time of death, mother's maiden name and father's name.
- Visit the funeral home you plan to use and if possible do any paper work that can be done in advance. Make sure you keep their contact details where you can easily access them when the need arises.

Once the death has occurred:

Call your doctor who will officially make the death pronouncement unless a previous alternative arrangement has been made.

Have someone call the funeral home that you have selected. This is an expected death so there is no need for police to be called. You may spend as long as necessary with your loved one before the body is removed. If the death occurs during the night, it may take the funeral /crematorium officials longer to arrive.

General information:

Once a death occurs in Panama it needs to be registered with the civil registry within 3 days. Normally the only document required to do this is the death certificate (Certificación de Declaración de Defunción). The registration can be done by a spouse, relative, anyone who lived in the same home as the deceased or by a person who runs the establishment which was the last home of the deceased.

The person requesting the registration will be asked to produce his /her cédula or passport depending on the status, as well as the cédula or passport of the deceased. Often the funeral home will take care of registering the death. No burial or cremation can be done in Panama without this step. Registry offices are located throughout Panama in the various offices of the Tribunal Electoral (TE) which are generally open between the hours of 7am and 3pm. In the Coronado Area, there is an TE office in Bejuco, in the Imperial Plaza just off the highway. If you do need to register the death yourself, blank Death certificates can be purchased for three dollars at most Machetazo, El Rey and Romero stores and the official stamps (3) can be purchased at the bank for a dollar each.

You may need several copies of the official death certificate in addition to the one required by the funeral home for cremation or burial. Additional copies may be required for the power of attorney, the embassy of the home country of the deceased, transfer of titles and to transfer the ashes out of Panama if that is your wish.

While Panama Hospice and Respite does not recommend one funeral home/crematorium over another those below have been recommended by some of our clients as providing good service.

Funerales Panameños La Auxiliador S.A. - Ave. Justo Arosemena Calle 32 (507)227-3458, 227-3018.

Funeraria Leblanc - Ave Ecuador No. 26, Panama City. (507) 225-6244

Funeraria Auxiliadora Cristo Rey – Ave Justo Arosemena and Calle 35, Panama City. (507) 225-0490, 225-1301 and evenings (507) 261-0747 This company also has funeral homes in Chorrera and Bethania.

Funeraria y Cremaciones Rey de Reyes S.A., - Bella Vista, Calle 42, Panama City. Tel: (507) 225-0643, (507) 6437-2331

Servicios de Cremación S.A., Via Santa Elena, Parque Lefevre, Panamá City. (507) 221-3961.

Coronado no longer has a funeral home but many clients use Colinas de la Paz, Nuevo Arraijan Via Interamericana. Tel: (507) 257-2935.

If a person wishes to have a body repatriated it is wise to contact their local embassy or consulate for assistance with the appropriate documentation.

You must notify your Embassy of the death to ensure vital records and process Social Security changes.

Embassies:

US Embassy – American Citizen Service Unit (507) 317-5000 www.panama.usembassy.gov

Canadian Embassy (507) 294-2500 www.panama.gc.ca

British Embassy (507) 297-6550 www.gov.uk/government/world/panama

French Embassy (507) 211-6200 www.ambafrance-pa.org