



## *Arizona State Board of Nursing*

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An advisory opinion adopted by AZBN is an interpretation of what the law requires. While an advisory opinion is not law, it is more than a recommendation. In other words, an advisory opinion is an official opinion of AZBN regarding the practice of nursing as it relates to the functions of nursing. Facility policies may restrict practice further in their setting and/or require additional expectations related to competency, validation, training, and supervision to assure the safety of their patient population and or decrease risk.

**OPINION: DETERMINATION OF DEATH:  
ROLE OF RN/LPN  
APPROVED DATE: 5/94  
REVISED DATE: 1/02, 3/06, 11/07, 5/10, 1/14, 3/17,  
9/20 9/24  
ORIGINATING COMMITTEE: LEGAL  
LEGISLATIVE**

Within the Scope of Practice of  X  RN  X  LPN

### **ADVISORY OPINION DETERMINATION OF DEATH: ROLE OF RN/LPN**

It is within the Scope of Practice of the Registered Nurse (RN) to assess a patient/client death. It is within the Scope of Practice for a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) to gather clinical data (R4-19-401), recognize significant changes, and to report these changes to a Licensed Practitioner (LP) or RN.

#### **I. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS**

- A. Written policies and procedures are maintained by the employer .
- B. An RN or LPN is able to make observations to determine the presence or absence of the following presumptive or conclusive signs of death
  - a. Presumptive signs include:
    - i. Unresponsive, no respirations/pulse
    - ii. Pupils fixed and dilated
    - iii. Body temperature indicates hypothermia: skin is cold relative to the patient's baseline skin temperature
    - iv. Generalized cyanosis
  - b. Conclusive signs include:
    - i. Presence of livor mortis (venous pooling of blood in dependent body parts causing purple discoloration of the skin which does not blanch with pressure).
- C. Documentation of presumptive and conclusive signs of death per institutional policy.

#### **II. RATIONALE**

An RN is able to assess a patient/client death and therefore determine death based on the assessment skills of the RN and the facility policies and procedures.

An LPN is able to gather clinical data, report findings to the LP/RN, and in accordance with the facility policy, the LPN may accept orders regarding the determination of death.

According to ARS 32-1601 (24) (a), the definition of “Registered nursing” includes the following: “Diagnosing and treating human responses to actual or potential health problems.” By this statute an RN has the authority to make an assessment and therefore, a determination of death. An RN’s assessment or determinant of death does not include the medical certification of death. Institutional policy may also guide the nurse's role in the assessment of death.

According to ARS 32-1601 (20) (a) “Practical nursing” includes the following activities that are performed under supervision of a physician or a registered nurse: (a) Contributing to the assessment of the health status of individuals and groups.

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