REGISTRAR GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

An Executive Agency
Since April 1, 1999

Instructions for Completing the Cause-of-Death Section of the Death Certificate

Accurate cause-of-death information is important:

- To the public health community in evaluating and improving the health of all citizens; and
- Often to the family, now and in the future, and to the person settling the decedent's estate.

The cause-of-death section consists of two parts. **Part I** is for reporting a chain of events leading directly to death, proceeding from the **immediate cause** of death (the final disease, injury, or complication directly causing death) to the **underlying cause** of death (the disease or injury that initiated the chain of morbid events which led directly to death). **Part II** is for reporting all other significant diseases or conditions that contributed to death but did not result in the underlying cause of death as given in **Part I.**

The CAUSE-OF-DEATH information should be YOUR best medical OPINION.

In completing the CAUSE-OF-DEATH Section:

- Print legibly using permanent **black** ink.
- Report each DISEASE, ABNORMALITY, INJURY, OR POISONING that you believe ADVERSELY AFFECTED the decedent. A condition can be listed as "probable" even if it has not been definitively diagnosed.
- If, in your opinion, the use of alcohol, tobacco, other substance by the decedent, or a recent pregnancy or injury caused or contributed to death, then this condition should be reported.

Example of Properly completed medical certification.

CAUSE OF DEATH		Approximate Interval between onset and death			
I		Years	Months	Days	Hours
Disease or condition directly leading to death*	(a) Acute renal failure			5	
	Due to (or as a consequence of)				
Antecedent Causes	(b) Hyperosmolar nonketotic coma			8	
Morbid condtions, if any, giving rise to the above cause, stating the underlying condition last.	Due to (or as a consequence of)				
	(c) Diabetes mellitus, non-insulin-dependent	15			
II					
Other significant conditions contributing to the death, but not related to the disease or condition causing it.	Hypertension, Arteriosclerotic coronary				
	disease				
*This does not mean the mode of dying e.g. heart failure, respiratory failure. It means the disease, injury, or complication that caused death					

(See reverse for instructions on the completion of each item)

CAUSE OF DEATH

PART I (Chain of events leading directly to death)

- Only **one** cause should be entered on each line.
- Line (a) **MUST ALWAYS** have an **immediate cause of death entry. DO NOT** leave blank.
- The mode of dying (for example, cardiac arrest and respiratory arrest) should not be used. However, if a mode of dying seems most appropriate to you for line (a), then you must always list its cause(s) on the line(s) below it (for example, cardiac arrest due to arrhythmia due to ischemic cardiac disease).
- Line (b) has the condition, **if any,** that gave rise to the immediate cause of death. If this in turn resulted from a further condition, report that condition on line (c). Report the full sequence; ADD more lines when necessary.
- ALWAYS enter the **underlying cause of death** on the lowest used line in Part I.
- The words "DUE TO (OR AS A CONSEQUENCE OF)," which are printed between the lines of Part I, apply to etiological or pathological sequences as well as to sequences in which an earlier condition is believed to have prepared the way for a subsequent cause by damage to tissues or impairment of function.
- If an organ system failure such as congestive heart, hepatic failure, renal failure, or respiratory failure is listed as a cause of death, always report an etiology for the end stage condition on the line(s) beneath it (for example, congestive heart failure due to ischemic cardiomyopathy).
- For each cause indicate the best estimate of the interval between the presumed onset and the date of death. The terms "approximately" or "unknown" may be used. **DO NOT** leave blank.

PART II (Other significant conditions)

- Enter all diseases or conditions that contributed to death that were not listed in the chain of events in Part I that did not result in the **underlying cause of death.**
- If two or more possible sequences resulted in death, report in Part 1 the one that, in your opinion, most directly caused death. Report in Part II the other conditions or diseases.

MANNER OF DEATH

- Deaths in which an accident, suicide, or homicide has occurred, MUST BE REFERRED TO THE CORONER. There are also other circumstances which require that the coroner intervene. **IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH THESE REQUIREMENTS.** Thus, in most cases certification by a physician other than a coroner, the manner of death will be "natural."

CHANGES TO CAUSE OF DEATH

- Should additional medical information or autopsy findings become available that would change the cause of death originally reported, the original death certificate should be amended by the certifying physician by **immediately** reporting the revised cause of death to the Registrar General's Department.

(Document extracted from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, edited to reflect Jamaica's system of death certification)
Prepared by: Registrar General's Department February 2006