

Bed Sore FAQs

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS FROM A NURSING HOME LAWYER

Is an autopsy necessary when a family suspects bed sores caused the death of a family member?

Deciding whether to have an autopsy performed on a loved one is indeed a very personal decision for a family to make following a death. An autopsy can help a family get answers to not only the cause of death, and in the case of potential medical negligence, what– if any, errors may have been made by a medical facility that may have caused the death.

What is an autopsy?

An autopsy is a detailed medical examination of the person's body and organs following death to establish the specific cause. Autopsies are performed by a physician, a pathologist, who is trained to evaluate results from physical examinations and laboratory results from tissue and blood samples to determine the cause of death.

Once the examination and laboratory results have been evaluated, an autopsy report is rendered. The report notes the physical findings and states a cause(s) of death. Because the report is rendered from an impartial author, it can be particularly useful in a litigation setting. Similarly, just a the report may be useful in case against a nursing home or hospital, results may also absolve the facility of responsibility if the results do not substantiate poor care.

In order to secure the most accurate results, most pathologists suggest performing an autopsy 24 to 48-hours after the death of a person. Depending on where the death occurred and the circumstances surrounding it, the autopsy may be performed by the state medical examiner or by a physician at a private hospital.

Is an autopsy called for in cases where a bed sore may have contributed or caused a death?

In my opinion, particularly in cases involving severe bed sores (also called pressure sores, pressure ulcers or decubitus ulcers), autopsies can be extremely helpful in rebutting arguments made by facilities who may argue that a death was the result of 'old age' or due to a 'variety complicated medical factors'.

Autopsies can be particularly helpful in prosecuting wrongful death matters related to bed sores due to the fact that a physician can make a medical determination as to the cause of death.

Specific medical complications such as infection and sepsis may be confirmed by an autopsy as opposed to speculation.

If you wish to have an autopsy performed on a loved one, you should contact your coroner or local hospital to get information about facilities that can perform one at your request.

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