§ 549.80 Authority to conduct autopsies.

(a) The Warden may order an autopsy and related scientific or medical tests to be performed on the body of a deceased inmate of the facility in the event of homicide, suicide, fatal illness or accident, or unexplained death. The autopsy or tests may be ordered in one of these situations only when the Warden determines that the autopsy or test is necessary to detect a crime, maintain discipline, protect the health or safety of other inmates, remedy official misconduct, or defend the United States or its employees from civil liability arising from the administration of the facility.

(1) The authority of the Warden under this section may not be delegated below the level of Acting Warden.

(2) When the conducting of an autopsy requires permission of the family or next-of-kin, the following message is to be included in the telegram notifying the family or next-of-kin of the death: “Permission is requested to perform a complete autopsy”. Also inform the family or next-of-kin that they may telegraph the institution collect with their response. Where permission is not received from the person (e.g., coroner or next-of-kin) authorized to permit the autopsy or post-mortem operation, an autopsy or post-mortem operation may not be performed under the conditions of this paragraph (b).

(c) In addition to the provisions of paragraphs (a) and (b) of this section, each institution also is expected to abide by the following procedures.

(1) Staff shall ensure that the state laws regarding the reporting of deaths are followed.

(2) Time is a critical factor in arranging for an autopsy, as this ordinarily must be performed within 48 hours. While a decision on an autopsy is pending, no action should be taken that will affect the validity of the autopsy results. Therefore, while the body may be released to a funeral home, this should be done only with the written understanding from the funeral home that no preparation for burial, including embalming, should be performed until a final decision is made on the need for an autopsy.