The reporting of hip fractures on Death Certificates has caused problems.

Before a physician undertakes certification of death, he/she must determine whether the fracture contributed to the death. Vital records will hold a Death Certificate, and report the death to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME), if the fracture is traumatic and listed on the certificate. This applies to a hip fracture reported in Part 1 (cause of death) or Part 2 (other conditions). The only fracture not reported to the OCME, is a pathologic or non-traumatic fracture. For example, if a patient had a fracture and subsequently developed a pulmonary embolus or pneumonia, the hip fracture was not only significant, it probably caused the death.

If the fracture was an incidental finding and did not significantly contribute to the death, then by definition, it should not be listed on the certificate. For example, if a patient had a traumatic hip fracture, was in the recovery phase, and had a myocardial infarct, the true cause of death is the coronary disease, not the hip fracture. This is particularly true if the fracture occurred a number of weeks or months prior to death.

There are many variations on this theme. Unfortunately, improper certification leads to significant delays in families receiving insurance benefits and properly completed certificates. If you have questions about the proper certification of any death, you may contact the OCME 24 hours a day by calling 1-800-870-8744. Let’s all work together to solve this problem.

Committee on Physician Health
Confidential professional help for substance abuse is available by contacting Dr. John Dalco, or Dr. David J. Simmons at 622-3374 or 623-9266.

BEST OF BOARDS

The Board recently received Honorable Mention in the Administrators in Medicine (AIM) Best of Boards Award Program for Outstanding Best Practices and Innovation. The award was presented to the Board at the AIM 2002 Annual Meeting in San Diego on April 24, 2002. The Board received the award for its Consumer Assistant Function. AIM is the National Organization for State Medical & Osteopathic Board Executives. The AIM Best of Boards Awards provide medical and osteopathic boards with the opportunity to share the benefit of their accomplishments with other boards and to receive recognition for their hard work.

The Consumer Assistant position, currently held by Tim Terranova, was created by the Legislature in 1998, and seeks to improve communications between the Board and the public. The Consumer Assistant serves as the primary contact point between the Board and the public, explaining the Board’s processes and decisions. In addition, the Consumer Assistant ensures that the Board understands the complainant’s concerns when it reviews the complaint. The Board has received high marks from constituents who have interacted with the Consumer Assistant, according to a recent survey conducted by the Board.

The Consumer Assistant has started an outreach program to educate the public on both the Board’s existence and the role of the Board. In addition, the Consumer Assistant also manages the web site and has worked on improving it for all consumers including the Board’s licensees. Improvements to the web site include adding an alphabetical list of adverse actions, adding a printable complaint form, providing several printable copies of applications for physicians, and creating links to other resources for the public.