

# INACCURATE DEATH CERTIFICATES CAN KILL YOU

## Underreporting Of Alzheimer's Disease Deprives Medical Researchers Of Critical Funding

Diane Hamele-Bena, MD

### SOLUTIONS



#### EDUCATION

All medical students, residents, licensed physicians, and other medical professionals permitted to complete cause of death information must receive training on how to correctly complete death certificates.



#### RECERTIFICATION EVERY THREE YEARS

Mandatory training/refresher course to be completed every few years, similar to requirements for narcotic management and infection control.



#### CAPACITY BUILDING

Work with states to enhance the capacity and expertise of staff in Bureau of Vital Statistics offices.

#### EXCELLENT FREE RESOURCES

- Online training module from CDC, National Center for Health Statistics
- CDC Physicians' Handbook on Medical Certification of Death
- National Association of Medical Examiners free cause of death mobile app

LEARN MORE

### CONTEXT



GLOBALLY, EVERY

4

SECONDS

A NEW CASE OF DEMENTIA IS DIAGNOSED

(2015 ESTIMATE, WHO DATA)

AT LEAST

50 MILLION

APPROXIMATE # OF CASES WORLDWIDE -

PROJECTED TO

DOUBLE IN 20 YEARS

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE IS NOT ONLY MEMORY LOSS.

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE KILLS PEOPLE.

### MY STORY

My mother had severe Alzheimer's Disease for over a decade, until she passed away in a nursing home, unable to move, speak, and even track objects with her eyes. Her medical records clearly documented this diagnosis throughout this entire time period.

A brain autopsy confirmed my mother's diagnosis of advanced Alzheimer's dementia, yet the term "Alzheimer's" or "dementia" does not appear anywhere on her death certificate--**NOT AS A CAUSE OF DEATH, BUT ALSO NOT EVEN AS AN ADDITIONAL CONDITION.** Instead, "cardiopulmonary arrest" was her stated cause of death. In addition, her death certificate incorrectly states that no autopsy had been performed. Three years later, the same incorrect cause of death was used on my father's death certificate.

**FOR THIS REASON, I RESEARCHED THIS ISSUE AND DISCOVERED THAT DEATH CERTIFICATES VERY COMMONLY CONTAIN ERRONEOUS CAUSES OF DEATH.**

DID YOU KNOW?



CARDIAC ARREST IS A SYMPTOM OF DEATH, NOT A CAUSE OF DEATH

THAT'S WHY CDC's Standard Certificate of Death contains this clear instruction about causes of death:

"DO NOT enter terminal events such as cardiac arrest, respiratory arrest, or ventricular fibrillation...."

### WHY CARE?

\$\$\$\$\$

DEATH CERTIFICATE INFORMATION DRIVES FUNDING

Records of death are used by governments worldwide to

- plan for health care
- set priorities for health care funding
- equitably fund medical research

In addition, death certificates can have significant impacts on

- insurance and pension benefits
- estate settlements
- evidence in court cases
- knowledge of family medical history

But studies show that up to

91%

OF DEATH CERTIFICATES CONTAIN MAJOR ERRORS THAT MAY IMPACT NATIONAL MORTALITY STATISTICS

### IMPACT

"Quality of mortality data is largely dependent on proper and thorough completion of death certificates by certifiers."  
-Centers for Disease Control

In order to be considered as a cause of death in CDC mortality data, Alzheimer's Disease/ Dementia **MUST** be listed on death certificates.

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE, THOUGH COMMON, IS GROSSLY UNDERFUNDED IN TERMS OF MEDICAL RESEARCH

2012-2015 FISCAL YEAR FUNDING

