# Identification of

## **Unidentified Patients**

### **Model Policy**

January 2017



New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services 80 South Swan Street, Albany, New York 12210

www.criminaliustice.nv.gov

#### Identification of Unidentified Patients – Model Policy

This model policy has been prepared to assist hospitals and medical facilities in developing policies and procedures for missing and unidentified person's investigations consistent with New York State statutes and regulations. The information contained in this document is meant to provide guidance and highlight points to consider when drafting a policy to meet the needs of a particular community. This document is not intended to direct policy development nor does it purport to contain the only acceptable practices. It is recommended that each hospital and medical facility consult with its own legal advisor prior to adopting or amending a final policy regarding identification of unknown patients.

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#### THE 2017 EDITION IS PUBLISHED BY THE:

New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services

Missing Persons Clearinghouse

80 South Swan Street

Albany, New York 12210

http://criminaljustice.ny.gov

VERSION January 2017

#### PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

#### Acknowledgements

The New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) acknowledges the extensive work done by the following associations and agencies:

#### Albany Medical Center

John Heritage, Director of Security

#### Albany Memorial Hospital and Samaritan Hospital

John S. Janikas, MD, Director of Emergency Medicine

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#### New York State Department of Health

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#### I. PURPOSE

This policy is designed to provide guidance to emergency department staff in developing procedures for the identification of unidentified patients that are admitted to the hospital.

#### II. POLICY:

When an unidentified patient is admitted to the Hospital, the admissions staff will coordinate efforts to determine the unidentified patient's identity.

#### III. DEFINITIONS:

- A. Adequate identification: the ability of the patient or their escort to identify the patient by name and date of birth or the patient has written identification such as a driver's license that contains that information.
- B. Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA): the federal Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) established national standards for the security and privacy of health data. HIPAA privacy rules (45 CFR § 164.501 et seq.)

HIPAA allows disclosures to law enforcement in the following cases:

- Court Order, Warrant, Subpoena, or Administrative Process: a Provider may disclose information in response to a court order, warrant, subpoena or other administrative process if certain conditions are satisfied. (45 CFR § 164.512(f)(1)(ii));
- 2. Identify Person: if law enforcement requests information to help identify or locate a suspect, fugitive, material witness or missing person, a Provider may disclose the following limited information: (a) name and address, (b) date and place of birth, (c) social security number, (d) ABO blood type and rh factor, (e) type of injury, (f) date and time of treatment, (g) date and time of death, and (h) a description of distinguishing physical characteristics. Other information related to the individual's DNA, dental records, body fluid or tissue typing, samples, or analysis cannot be disclosed under this provision, but may be disclosed in response to a court order, warrant, or written administrative request. (45 CFR § 164.512(f)(2)). The disclosure must be in response to a request from law enforcement, which may include a response to a "wanted" poster or bulletin;
- 3. Death: a Provider may disclose information to notify law enforcement about the death of an individual if the Provider believes the death may have resulted from a crime;

- 4. Fugitive: a Provider may disclose information to law enforcement to identify or apprehend an individual who appears to have escaped from lawful custody. (45 CFR § 164.512(j)(1)(ii)(B));
- 5. Medical Examiners and Coroners: a Provider may disclose information about a decedent to medical examiners or coroners to assist them in identifying the decedent, determining the cause of death, or to carry out their other authorized duties. (45 CFR § 164.512(g)(1));
- 6. When considering disclosures to law enforcement, Providers should consider the following:
  - a) If the law enforcement official making the request for information is not known to the Provider, the Provider must verify the identity and authority of such person prior to disclosing the information, e.g., by requesting identification. (45 CFR § 164.514(h));
  - b) Except when required by law, a Provider should limit disclosures to the minimum necessary. (45 CFR §§ 164.502(b), 164.514(d)). When reasonable to do so, the Provider may rely upon the representations of the law enforcement official (as a public officer) as to what information is the minimum necessary for their lawful purpose. (45 CFR § 164.514(d)(3)(iii)(A));
  - c) In all cases, a Provider should document the circumstances surrounding the disclosure to law enforcement in the log for accounting of disclosures as required by 45 CFR § 164.528.
- C. New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services Missing Persons Clearinghouse: the Missing Persons Clearinghouse is responsible for providing assistance to law enforcement agencies handling cases involving children, college students and vulnerable adults who have gone missing. The Clearinghouse maintains a 24/7 hotline at 800-346-3543.
- D. National Center for Missing and Exploited Children: the leading nonprofit organization in the U.S. working with law enforcement, families and the professionals who serve them on issues related to missing and sexually exploited children.
- E. National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs): is a national centralized repository and resource center for missing persons and unidentified decedent records. NamUs is a free online system that can be searched by medical examiners, coroners, law enforcement officials and the general public from all over the country in hopes of resolving these cases.
- F. National Crime Information Center (NCIC): is a computerized index of criminaljustice information (i.e., criminal-record-history information, fugitives, stolen properties, missing persons, unidentified bodies). Records contained in NCIC are provided by federal, state, local, and foreign criminal-justice agencies, as well as authorized courts. The index is available to federal, state, and local lawenforcement and other criminal-justice agencies and is operational 24 hours a

day, 365 days a year.

G. Unidentified Patient – when a patient is brought to the Emergency Department without any identification and is not able to self-identify.

#### IV. PROCEDURE:

- A. Upon the arrival of an unidentified patient:
  - 1. The admission staff member will review the chart, personal belongings and hospital records to determine if there is any information regarding patient's identity;
  - 2. The admission staff member will notify the Information Desk so that inquiries related to the unidentified patient are referred to the appropriate staff as well as public safety personnel.
  - 3. The patient will be registered into the hospital database with a last name of **Unidentified** and a first name of either **Male** or **Female** which will be dependent on their gender. Should there be multiple unidentified patients admitted during a disaster or other such incident; they will be registered as follows: **Male Unidentified I**, **Male Unidentified II**, etc. Detailed physical descriptions should be entered into the database. This will enable staff to more readily search for a patient should there be an inquiry from the public or a family member.
- B. If initial identification efforts fail, the admissions staff will contact hospital public safety who will then contact the local law enforcement agency and request that a police report be completed for an unidentified living/deceased person. The law enforcement agency should be requested to enter the unidentified patient into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database as an Unidentified Living Person or an Unidentified Deceased Person (see attached NCIC Initial Entry Report).
- C. The admissions staff as well as public safety officers should also monitor incoming e-mails and faxes from the New York State Missing Persons Clearinghouse. The Missing Persons Clearinghouse routinely sends out posters on active Missing Persons cases (Missing Child, Missing College Student and Missing Vulnerable Adult). These posters for the most part contain a photo as well as a description of the missing person. Additionally, a check of the following websites should be conducted in an attempt to identify the patient:

New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services Missing Persons Clearinghouse Children <u>http://criminaljustice.ny.gov//missing/#/</u>

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children http://www.missingkids.org/search

National Missing and Unidentified Persons Systems http://namus.gov

- D. If there is a request from a law enforcement officer inquiring in regard to unidentified patients, the hospital staff will conduct a search of the admissions records to determine if there is a patient who may be a "possible match" for the missing person. The "possible match" information should be provided to the requesting law enforcement officer and every effort should be made to assist in identifying the patient. Refer to HIPAA privacy rules (45 CFR § 164.501 et seq.):
  - 1. Law enforcement verification standards include but are not limited to:
    - a) Official law enforcement agency email;
    - b) Official law enforcement agency fax;
    - c) In-person request of law enforcement officer with proper identification;
    - d) Hospital Public Safety/Security personnel can also assist with law enforcement verification;
    - e) Existing hospital policies.
  - 2. Clinical information including but not limited to substance abuse and HIV testing should not be released to law enforcement.
- E. If finger printing services are needed, the admissions staff or public safety personnel will contact the local law enforcement agency to request that fingerprints of the unidentified patient be taken and processed:
- F. If identification has not been made through the process of fingerprinting, the admissions staff or public safety personnel shall make a referral to the Public Information Officer to obtain a photograph of the patient as well as significant facts that will help with identification. This information, along with the photograph, will be submitted to local media outlets, (print and TV) for assistance in identification. Consideration will be given to a specific locale if the patient's point of origin is known or suspected;
- G. If the patient's condition makes it impossible for a photograph to be taken, details will be submitted for publication without the photograph;
- H. If the patient is not identified within one week of publication of the photograph, the photograph and significant facts shall be submitted for publication in a wider area, until identification has been made.
- I. A DNA sample can be collected by utilizing a DNA control kit and then forwarding the sample to one of the regional centers for classification and possible matching. Refer to attached list of regional centers;
- J. When identification of a patient is made known, the Manager in the Admitting Department is to be notified immediately so that the system and all records may be updated;

- K. The elements necessary for identification are: patient's name, address, date of birth, social security # (if known), and next of kin;
- L. The Manager in the Admitting Department is responsible for ensuring that appropriate changes are made in the hospital's registration system;
- M. The Manager in the Admitting Department is responsible for notifying the Medical Records department when it is deemed necessary to merge multiple patient record numbers.

#### V. Applicable Health Laws:

- A. HIPAA privacy rules (45 CFR § 164.501 et seq.);
- B. MHL § 33.13. Clinical records; confidentiality;
- C. § 164.510 Uses and disclosures requiring an opportunity for the individual to agree or to object.
- Note: The titles of those responsible for implementing this policy are generic and should be modified to coincide with the staff titles for each individual hospital.

#### Attachments:

- NCIC Unidentified Data Collection Entry Guide (NCIC Initial Entry Report)
- DNA Regional Laboratories

NCIC Initial Entry Report				
Message Key (MKE) (See Categories, page 2)		Date		
Unidentified Deceased (EUD) Unidentified Living (EUL) Unidentified Catastrophe Victim (EUV)		Reporting Agency (ORI)		
Body Parts Status (BPS)	-	omplete body or skeleton, see body diagram page 7 for coding corresponding parts		
All 15 parts recovered - fresh (ALF)	N - Not Recovered D - Rec	overed Decomposed T - Recovered Fresh S - Skeletal		
All 15 parts recovered - decomposed (ALD)				
All 15 parts recovered - skeletal (SKL)	1 2 3 4	5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15		
Sex (SEX) □	Race (RAC)			
$\square Male (M) Female (F)$	Asian or Pacific Islander (A)			
Unknown (U)	Black (B)	White (W)		
Estimated Year of Birth Range (EYB)		Date Body Found (DBF)		
Approximate Height Range (HGT) Approximate Weight Range (WGT)				
Eye Color (EYE)     Image: Color (EYE)     Image: Color (EYE)     Image: Color (EYE)       Black (BLK)     Green (GRN)     Unknown (XXX)       Blue (BLU)     Hazel (HAZ)     Multicolored (MUL)       Brown (BRO)     Maroon (MAR)       Gray (GRY)     Pink (PNK)				
Scars, Marks, Tattoos, and other Characteristics (SMT) (See Checklist, page 8)				
Fingerprint Classification (FPC)*	Origina	ting Agency Case Number (OCA)		
Miscellaneous ( <b>MIS</b> ) Information such as build, I the individual was found, should be included. If		hair description, and weather conditions at the time of death, place where tional sheet.**		

\* Fingerprints, if available, may be submitted electronically via the CJIS Wide Area Network or in hard copy to the FBI, CJIS Division, Post Office Box 4142, Clarksburg, West Virginia 26302-9929.

\*\* All dental information should be recorded on the NCIC Unidentified Person Dental Report and entered into NCIC as supplemental information.

Blood Type ( <b>BLT</b> )							
A Positive (APOS) A Negative (ANEG)	□ B Positive (BPOS) □ B Negative (BNEG)		AB Positive (ABPOS)	O Positive (OPOS) Unknow			Unknown (UNKWN)
A Unknown (AUNK)	B Unknowr		AB Unknown (ABUNK)			wn (OUNK)	
Circumcision? (CRC)	Footprints available? (FPA)		Body X-Rays available? ( <b>BXR</b> )	have	Does the Unidentified Person have corrected vision? (SMT)		Corrective Vision Prescription (VRX)
Was	□ Yes		Full (F)	(514	[)		
□ Was Not	🗆 No		Partial (P)	ΠY		Glasses	
Unknown			None (N)	□ N	o 🗌	Con Lenses	
Manner and cause of Death	(CDA)	Describe					
Natural Causes (N)	Suicide (S)						
Accidental (A)	Unknown (U)						
Homicide (H)							
Jewelry Type ( <b>JWT</b> ) (See Checklist, page 20) Jewelry Description ( <b>JWL</b> ) (See Checklist, page 20)							
DNA Profile Indicator (DNA) DNA Location (DLO)							
Yes							
□ No							
Medical Examiner/Coroner Agency Name and Case Number (MAN)		Medical Examiner/Coroner Locality (MAL)					
Medical Examiner/Coroner Telephone Number (MAT)		Investigating Officer and Telephone Number (MIS)					
NCIC Number (NIC)							

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