



Internal Memorandum

TO: Aram Hosie
Principal Policy Officer

SUBJECT: Mortuary Facilities in Remote Communities

Mortuary Facilities in WA Country Health Service

Mortuary facilities are typically co-located within WACHS hospitals. In the Kimberley, mortuary facilities are located at the following hospitals: Halls Creek, Kununurra, Wyndham, Broome, Derby and Fitzroy Crossing. There are no private mortuary facilities in the Kimberley. Private funeral directors are based in Broome, Derby and Kununurra.

There are no mortuary facilities located in remote health clinics under WACHS management in the Kimberley. The National Pathology Accreditation Advisory Council has established guidelines for the Facilities and Operation of Hospital and Forensics Mortuaries (2004)¹. This document provides guidance on all types of mortuary facilities and operation, including specifications for reliable water and power supply, temperature control, ventilation, security and storage. It is very difficult for remote health clinics to meet these guidelines.

There are also a number of cultural concerns with co-location of mortuary facilities within remote health clinics, which may impact on access to and cultural acceptance of the health service.

In consideration of the above WACHS current policy position is that remote facilities do not host mortuary facilities.

If a death occurs in a remote community, the deceased is held in a climate controlled clinical room until collected, transferred and cared for by the nearest hospital mortuary. Transportation occurs as soon as possible and is undertaken either by air or road. The deceased is held at the hospital mortuary until funeral arrangements are made. If the funeral is to occur in the remote community, the deceased is returned to the community immediately prior to the funeral. The remote clinic may assist with holding and viewing prior to the funeral.

¹ National Pathology Accreditation Advisory Council (2004) Guidelines for the Facilities and Operation of Hospital and Forensics Mortuaries (2004). Commonwealth of Australia.
<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-npaac-docs-mortuari.htm>

Facilities in Balgo

Whilst Balgo has no mortuary facilities, Mr Bruce Smyth, Manager of Katjunka Health Service has advised that Balgo currently has two single body holding fridges. The fridges are managed by the Katjunka Catholic Parish, as the undertaker for the community, and located at the Catholic Mission. The fridges were recently relocated to the Katjunka Health Service clinic due to power supply issues (the clinic has a generator to ensure reliable power supply). Mr Smyth advised that the fridges are utilised as temporary storage until the deceased could be transferred to the nearest hospital mortuary facility, and do not operate as full mortuary facilities. He also highlighted the cultural issues with co-location of the body holding facilities at the health clinic.



Jeff Moffat
Chief Operating Officer
WA Country Health Service

2 October 2009