

VC EMS TRAINING BULLETIN

Bulletin 015
Date: December 23, 2011

IMPROVING QUALITY...CONTINUOUSLY



Ventura County Emergency Medical Services Agency

POSITIONING THE BODY TO DETERMINE DEATH

According to VCEMS Policy 606, unless a patient is "Obviously Dead" (Decapitation, Incineration, or Decomposition), a further assessment is required to determine death, which includes opening the airway. This applies to all patients with any circumstance that interferes (or may interfere) with adequate breathing - including oropharyngeal foreign body, drowning, ligature around the neck, compression of the anterior neck, and hanging.

In all of the above instances when rigor or lividity is present, the patient must be repositioned to accommodate the following required assessment:

1. Open the airway and auscultate lungs for 30 seconds
2. Pulse check for 60 seconds, auscultate heart sounds for 60 seconds (ALS: monitor for 60 seconds in 2 leads, print strip)
3. Check pupils for response, check response to painful stimuli.

VC EMS responders must act immediately to determine death, by removing ligatures in cases of strangulation, "cutting down" victims of hangings, removing drowning patients from water, and removing obstacles that hinder assessment.

Do not delay this action while waiting for law enforcement to respond.

If law enforcement requests that you maintain the body in the position in which it was found, and you are unable to assess, the responsibility for determining death will be transferred to law enforcement personnel.

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