

Questions and Responses about the Center for Health Statistics Overview

Q: Which units would be most likely be impacted by changes related to HB2420?

R: We won't know the answer to this until we go through this process in the Work Group. The goal for the Work Group is to come up with options, while considering the state as a whole, not only the impact on the CHS.

Q: How can funeral homes get out of being in the middle of cause of death and get the correct certifier? (sometimes the wrong box is checked by the certifier, causing extra fees and replacements and then funeral home needs to get the doctor to accept responsibility and commit to signing the death certification which allows the funeral home to move forward, typically with a cremation)

R: We need to make sure our medical certifiers get on the system with better training, and then also examining the fees for the amendments and replacements. We also need to get the correct medical certifier at the medical facility.

Q: How can we get doctors and staff to participate in OVERS?

R: We are continuing to do regular mandated training with medical certifiers, and marketing as much as we can as a part of our partner services team.

Q: Is there consistency in eligibility rights? What are the VitalChek Timelines? What does processed mean in the VitalChek system? How do we improve processing with VitalChek?

R: There should be consistency. These are great questions that we are working on addressing with VitalChek in order to improve processing time from our contractor.

Q: What is the obstacle to hiring? Why so many vacancies?

R: The level of the work and the salaries, especially for people living in Portland. Keep in mind that this is the average or the most common salary, so our starting salaries are significantly lower than that and we cannot negotiate salaries. Also, we require people to be in the office and many people want to work from home. During 2022-23, it took up to six months to do a recruitment because our HR recruiting office was so far behind, but now we

are at three months. From the time a person leaves to the time we can hire, we've been able to reduce it, but we are recruiting constantly.

Q: Why are there delays in amendments? How can amendments be expedited?

R: This is improving, but again, it's due to staffing shortages and amendments and vacancy rate. It's hard to bring in temps for amendments because it is very detailed and requires a lot of training and we can only keep temps in for six months at a time. So we are working on that and then expediting amendments.

Questions and Responses from Panel Discussion with County Work Group Representatives

Q: What does a typical day look like in your Vital Records work?

R: Panel members perform a variety of tasks, depending on the day.

- overseeing the program
- managing the department
- filling in for when people are absent
- notarizing documents related to Vital Records concerns
- fulfilling faxed or dropped off work orders from funeral homes that request death certificates (they drop them off and pick them up several times a day),
- processing birth certificate orders for families who walk-in, as well as orders that have been mailed or emailed
- office reception
- scheduling appointments
- ordering office supplies
- issuing county dog licenses
- issuing Goodwill vouchers
- receiving monies and order forms from employees for personal copies when they do their faxes
- directing the visiting public to various sites in the building
- regular trainings and check-ins with supervisors

Q: What is going well with your Vital Records work?

R: Panel members enjoy interfacing with the public, getting to see a lot of babies in the office, having a great working relationship with the people they serve and with the funeral homes. It is most enjoyable to have a very efficient process that works smoothly and allows them to provide death certificates in a timely manner for the families that they are serving. They all feel very positive about working with the state; that they can email questions and receive a prompt response with helpful information when needed. They appreciate having the right amount of people to process and not get behind, so they can process right away for funeral homes and birth certificates for families when they come. For some, online ordering is still new but working well, and they are pleased with how it's going in the process of becoming paperless. They appreciate having positive community partnerships and good working relationships.

Q: What is challenging in your Vital Records work?

R: The panel members find amendments to be the most challenging, especially when there are walk-in customers and they've got more complicated situations that they are trying to resolve, and it is usually an amendment that should have been done years ago. Amendments can cause long delays, especially when having to wait for a response for a doctor, and they are not able to have an answer for the family.

- The six-month cut off: The county has to turn families away after six months from the date of the event. In these cases, families are already waiting for an amendment when the six-month mark occurs, and then the county has to issue a refund and explain that they can no longer issue a certificate.
- Absenteeism: Employee absences can be a challenge, not everyone is trained to do all kinds of certificates.
- A local ME: Not having a local medical examiner is creating a lag in the process.
- Electronic systems: Not having everyone using electronic systems creates another lag.
- Not being able to serve across jurisdictions: Sometimes the county has to turn families away because they live in another county.

Q: What is next for your County in terms of its Vital Records work?

R: While some panel members are not anticipating any major changes, some are doing a lot of big changes with an online portal, through which they hope the funeral homes will be able to place orders. Some members anticipate that if the counties responsibilities increase as far the timeline and being able to issue other counties certificates, the workload might

increase and that they may need to hire more people. Some counties would like to do more and increase the work of their Vital Records team.

Q: Are there other things about your work that we haven't heard about? More comments?

R: Amendments:

- Panel members explained the complications that arise with amendments and hybrid documents. The amendments create a lot of work and carbon footprint because the runner is coming several times a day. The hybrids are like an art project with the amount of white-out on them. Amendments are going to happen, but the hybrid is a mess. There is so much back and forth, for instance, if the doctor didn't sign it, or they didn't put the time of death, or things are misspelled, so it has to be reissued. The hybrids are also called the drop to paper, when the doctor needs a wet signature on it. The funeral home does a portion of the death certificate through OVERS, there's a backside that they end up printing that they take to the doctor or the ME who does a physical wet signature, writes in the time and cause of death, and submits this document with an order form to get it processed. Otherwise, the order form can be done through OVERS, but a hybrid requires scanning in the long form, then putting a piece of white paper over the bottom half to make a short form, which is kind archaic. Some panel members reported having to white out the hybrid, then scan it in and then use a tool or a typewriter to enter in the correct information.
- When the doctors write in, it's not often legible, and they can't understand the cause of death. If this results in a mistake, they have to get an affidavit to correct that error. If it was the doctor's mistake or funeral home's mistake, the county has to use a typewriter to correct it, but this results in an unprofessional looking document in the end. They expressed that it would be great if the doctors could just get on board with the electronic system and that it would be easier all around with less mistakes and less traffic. Sometimes the error is on the part of the funeral home.

Q: Would you be willing to talk more about the transitions and your hopes for the coming year?

R: One county has been transitioning to electronic and should soon have a portal for funeral homes which they hope will provide a better customer service experience. Also, ordering and paying for death certificates will be easier because families can just place one order.

Q: Could someone shed some light on the remark as to if the House bill passes that the workload would increase? Why is this the case?

R: HB 2420 did pass, and the passage of the bill was the creation and assignment of this Work Group. There is no other legislation. What this Work Group is doing now to look at equitable fees and equitable access to records, and coming up with options is what is going to be the result of this committee. At the end of the year, a report about the options explored in the Work Group will go to the legislature.

Q: What does an increased workload look like then as a result of this Work Group?

R: If the six-month and/or location limitations are lifted, it will be open to any location or date of death or birth, so the workload may increase because people could come to the counties instead of the state past the six-month mark.

Q: Could you share more about your fees if you have an idea what percentage of the fees covers the vitals record work, or if you're getting other fees from other areas to help cover the Vital Records work? Do you get enough Vital Records fees to cover the staff and work that you do if you're able to answer that?

R: Some panel members reported that the fees they collect covers the cost of the work, while others did not have access to that information or wondered if the general fund would cover the costs because it is public health.

Q: When we have to order death certificates from other counties (where the death happened) sometimes we have never dealt with that county before, so we try to either use the phone number that's on the page that's given for the order forms, or the fax number. There are no emails to where we can send the order forms to those counties to order those death certificates. How do those counties want to be paid? Do they want us to mail them a check? Will they take a visa by phone? Every county seems to be a little different, so as a funeral home it's hard to remember what county wants which way.

R: The panel members explained that they send letters to funeral homes to let them know about any changes. They inform the funeral homes they have on file, but the funeral home doesn't always update the county in return with their information. The counties need this communication too and expressed that ideally this communication goes both ways, so everyone keeps up to date with current contact information.

- Some prefer a fax over email so everyone can access the incoming orders and can call and ask for payment.

- The counties bill all of the funeral homes at the end of every month, which seems to work as they don't have problems with receiving payments.

Q: It sounds like one of the options that might be recommended is the proposal to change the six month or county of event limit. How prepared do the counties feel to handle this volatility that could happen in terms of order volume? If the amount of orders increase or decrease significantly how would your county adapt to that? Do the counties feel ready to handle an increase if this happens? Would the county staffing be able to adapt?

R: The panel members expect it would be an increase and would need to assess how much before hiring more staff. They would also look to train more staff to all of the different roles in order to be more fluid and cover for absences. Some also felt that a decrease would be okay since they have plenty of other work to do.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like the group to understand about your work?

R:

- One of the counties used to do billing monthly, but switched to pay as you go because payments didn't work or go through. It was difficult at first, but now it's really smooth and it has eliminated billing problems.
- Another county has updated their website to with all the information about where and how to order, with links and instructions, which has helped funeral homes stay up to date on billing.
- Another member expressed that they like serving the public and felt that being able to do this past the six months limit would be a huge thing for the public, so they are committed to handle what the changes may bring, whether the volume goes up or down.