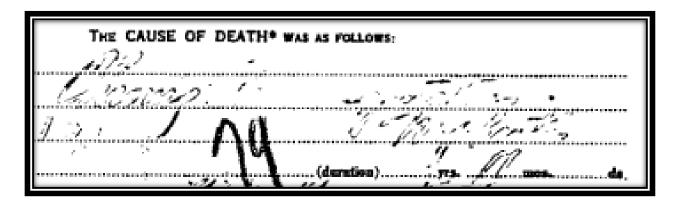
## A Fresh Look at Death Certificates Deciphering Causes of Death

By Judy Janes October 18, 2016

## **Death Certificates**

Sometimes it is almost impossible to read the attending physician's handwritten cause of death, or to understand the terms used. Don't despair, there may be an easy solution.



Some, but not all, death certificates included a number usually written near the area where the cause of death was recorded. Sometimes you may encounter several sets of numbers if there were contributing factors involved in an individual's death. These numbers represent standardized national codes classifying the cause of death, and were typically added by a clerk who processed the death record. The government then used the codes to compile statistical information about all causes of death.

PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS	MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH
DATE OF BIRTH  (Month)  (Day)  (Year)	16 DATE OF DEATH  (Month) (Day) (Year)  17 I HEREBY CERTIFY, That I attended deceased from Hol 3, 191, 9, to Hol 2, 191, 9,
OCCUPATION (a) Trade, profession, or narticular kind of work	and that death occurred, on the date stated above, a firm.  The CAUSE OF DEATH* was as follows:
(b) General nature of industry, business, or establishment in which employed (or employer) Construction  BIRTHPLACE (State or country)	(Duration) × yrs. × mos. ds.
Ohio.	Contributory (Duration) yrs mos ds.

The number "10" represents the ICD code added by a clerk

I Cross pros VI correct	
PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS	MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH
3. SEX 4. COLOR S. SINGLE, MARRIED. Write the word widowed or 1.	21. DATE OF DEATH (month, day, and year) Chu & , 18 40
male White Divorced Willowed	22. I HERBY CERTIFY, That I, stunded deceased from
Six If Married, Widowed, or Divocced Hisband of (or) Wis of	I last year h 1477, slive on 475 & La 1940, death is said
6. DATE OF BIRTH (month, day, and year) 744, 20, 1871	to have occurred on the date stated above at
7. AGE (years) Months Days If LHSS than 1 dayhrs.	The PRINCIPAL CAUSE OF DEATH and related causes of importance in order of onset were as follows:
8. Trade, profession, or particular kind of work done, as spinner, and the sawyer, bookkeeper, etc.  9. Industry or business in which work was done, so silk mill, sew mill, bank, etc.  10. Data decreed last worked at this occupation (month and speed in this occupation (month and speed in the last worked)	Continuous of fix mond 7/39  Fig. Color Continuous of Importance not related

The number  $\underline{3869}$  represents an "business or industry" identity code, and should not be confused with ICD Code  $\underline{46C}$ 

In 1900 the U. S. adopted what is called the International Classification of Diseases. This coding system has undergone revisions approximately every ten years since then, the latest taking place in 2004.

The early ICD coding used a numeric system that consisted of 191 different causes of death. An alpha-numeric system was added to Revision 2.

```
1 Enteric fever
2 Typhus
3
3A Relapsing fever
3B Mediterranean fever
4 Malaria
5 Small-pox
6 Measles
7 Scarlet fever
8 Whooping cough
9
9A Diphtheria
9B Membranous laryngitis
9C Croup
```

Example of ICD Codes from Revision 2 – 1909-1919

## **How to Use the ICD to Decipher Handwritten Causes of Death**

Wolfbane Cybernetic, Ltd. has posted the complete set of ICD codes from 1900 through 1990. They are grouped by Revision Numbers 1 through 10. Subsequent revisions will be of little use.

- ➤ Begin by examining the death certificate to locate the ICD code as it may have been written anywhere on the certificate
- Select the Revision for the most recent year prior to the individual's date of death then scroll down to find the code number you need
- These codes may help you decipher the illegible handwritten cause of death

The International Classification of Diseases with a complete list of revisions and causes of death codes: <a href="http://www.wolfbane.com/icd/index.html">http://www.wolfbane.com/icd/index.html</a>

The history of the "Classification of Diseases and Causes of Death" by the Center for Disease Control (C.D.C.)

http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/misc/classification\_diseases2011.pdf

Classifications of Death – It includes examples of modern classifications and the C.D.C.'s rules governing them.

https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/ppt/nchs2012/li-14 minino.pdf

## **Old Medical Terminology**

Greene, Ryland W., *Lippincott's Pocket Medical Dictionary*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1897. <a href="https://archive.org/details/b21782441">https://archive.org/details/b21782441</a>

Bureau of the Census, *Manual of the International List of Causes of Death.* Washington, D.C., 1918.

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