

## Death

Medical Ethics Committee  
Islamic Medical Association of North America

### Definition

An attempt to define the end of life of a human being and to subscribe to the concept of brain death.

### Qur'anic Verses

1. "It is He who gives life and death; and when He decides upon an affair He says to it "Be" and it is." Chapter 40, verse 68.
2. "Nor can a soul die except by Allāh's leave. The term being fixed as by writing..." Chapter 3, Verse 145.
3. "It is Allāh that takes the souls at death; and those that die not (He takes) during their sleep. Those on whom He has passed the decree of death, He keeps back (from returning to life) but the rest He sends (to their bodies) for a term appointed..." Chapter 39, Verse 42.
4. "Every soul shall have a taste of death; In the end, to Us shall ye be brought back." Chapter 29, Verse 57.

### 'Ahādīth

None available

### Other sources

1. Yaseen MN: The end of human life in the light of the opinions of Muslim scholars and medical science. *J Islam Med Assn* 1991;23:74-81.
2. Ethics of critically ill patients, an Islamic viewpoint. *J Islam Med Assn* 1983;15:105-9.
3. Khan, FA: The definition of death in Islam: can brain death be used as a criterion of death in Islam? *J Islam Med Assn* 1986;18:18-21.
4. Hathout H: Fundamental values of Islam-life, suffering, and death-their meaning for medical care and social justice.
5. "Aspects of Resuscitation," Resolution/Statement/Fatwa. The Board of Islamic Congress of Jurists - 3rd meeting held in Amman (Jordan) 11th to 16th October, 1986.

### Discussion

Permanent cessation of (self sustained) cardiopulmonary function when diagnosed by a physician is death. The concept of brain death is necessitated when artificial means to maintain cardiopulmonary function are employed. In Islam, the physician is responsible for making the diagnosis of death. From the above quoted verses of the Glorious Qur'an, the following points are established without doubt.

1. Every living person dies
2. There is a definite time of death.
3. Permanent parting of the Soul from body is death.

Just as the life of a person begins with the "ensoulment of the body" so the end of life occurs by permanent separation of the Soul from the body. We as physicians make the diagnosis of death from observations and examination. The exact moment of death of a person and the exact relation of the soul and body is only known to Allāh. As human beings we the (Muslim) physicians must admit our paucity of knowledge and must depend upon the tools and methods available to make that diagnosis both by examination of cardiorespiratory function and by the determination of brain-death by neurologic examination. As noted above Islamic jurists have agreed with the concept of brain death.

### Position/Official Statement of IMA

A person will be considered dead when one or both conditions given below are met.

1. A physician has determined after standard examination that a person's cardiorespiratory function has come to a permanent stop.
2. A specialist physician had determined after standard examination that the function of brain including brainstem has come to a permanent stop, even if some organs of the body may continue to show some activity (by artificial means).