



The Hospice Friendly Hospitals Programme
Guidance document for using the end of life
symbol.



The Hospice Friendly Hospitals Programme is an initiative of
The Irish Hospice Foundation in partnership with the Health Service Executive

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This is a guidance document for hospital staff. The aim of this document is to outline the recommended use of the end of life symbol, to support clarity and consistency in its use. This document can be referred to when developing hospital policies and guidelines.

Background

The end of life symbol can be explained as follows

- The three-stranded white spiral represents the interconnected cycle of birth, life and death.
- The white outer circle represents continuity, infinity and completion.
- Purple was chosen as the background colour as it is associated with nobility, solemnity and spirituality.

The symbol was developed by the Irish Hospice Foundation's Hospice Friendly Hospitals Programme. It is inspired by ancient Irish history and is not associated with any one religion or denomination.

The end of life symbol is typically used

- In a clinical area of a hospital to signal that a person has died.
- In a public area of a hospital to indicate the hospital uses the symbol in clinical areas and that the hospital is linked to the Hospice Friendly Hospitals Programme.
- On resources associated with end-of-life care and bereavement.

Displaying the symbol in a hospital

Displaying the end of life symbol in a clinical area of a hospital

The Hospice Friendly Hospitals Programme recommends displaying the end of life symbol when a person has died.¹ The symbol is most frequently used in this instance and the suggested areas where the symbol can be displayed include

- at a nurses' station
- at the entrance to the area where a person has died
- on the door of a room where a person has died having first discussed this with bereaved family members

On seeing the symbol, staff should create an atmosphere of quiet, avoid mobile phone use and be prepared to meet people who are grieving.

In certain circumstances and at the discretion of each individual hospital the symbol may be used when a person is imminently dying. If using the symbol on the door of a single room when a person is dying it is recommended that hospital staff discuss this first with the dying person and/or their family.

It is important that hospital staff are clear about when to display the symbol. This can help to ensure consistency in when the symbol is displayed and help to avoid confusion.

If at any stage displaying the symbol is a matter of concern, the wishes of the dying person/bereaved family should be respected.

When the deceased person has been moved from the clinical area it is important to remove the end of life symbol and store it in a safe place.

¹ The Quality Standards for End-of-Life Care (2010) recommend: 'A universal symbol, which is recognised by all staff and by the public as indicating that a death has occurred, is clearly visible in the ward/department'.

Displaying the symbol in a public area of a hospital

The end of life symbol can be displayed in a public area of a hospital to indicate the hospital is linked to the Hospice Friendly Hospitals Programme. It is recommended that background information for patients and visitors should be displayed alongside the symbol.

Suggested public areas where the symbol may be displayed include

- Main entrance(s)
- At elevators and public stairwells
- Areas of high footfall such as cafés, shops, information stands, waiting areas, etc.

The end of life symbol can also be incorporated into the design of spaces specifically associated with end-of-life care such as a mortuary or a bereavement suite. However, it is not recommended using the symbol to identify family rooms or meeting rooms.

See www.designanddignity.ie for more examples and advice on incorporating the symbol into the physical environment of hospitals.



*Frosted glass
Mercy University Hospital mortuary*

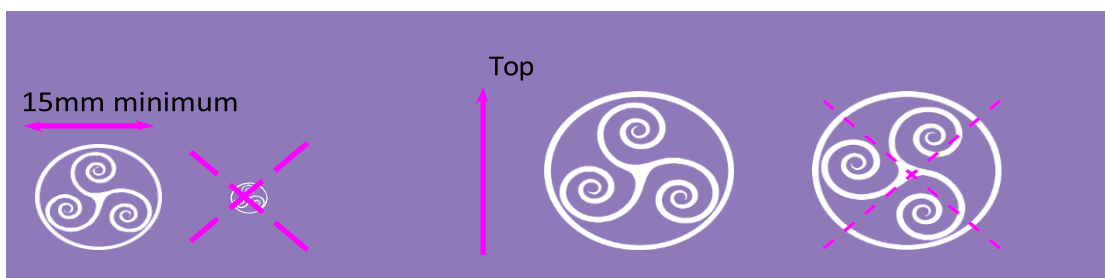


*Stained glass
Beaumont Hospital bereavement suite*

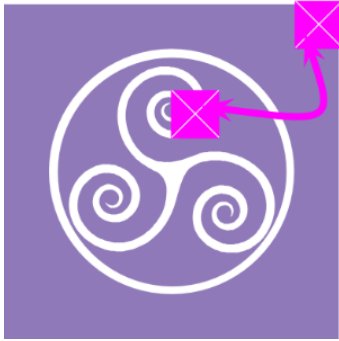
Using the symbol on end-of-life care or bereavement resources

To maintain visual consistency the following information should be considered when designing resources such as leaflets, drapes, admission cards, candles, sympathy cards, etc. The symbol is available in multiple design formats from the Hospice Friendly Hospitals Programme office.

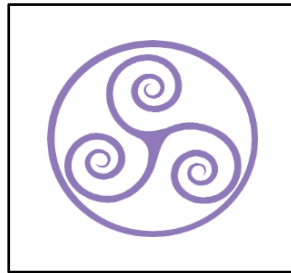
The Hospice Friendly Hospitals Programme should be acknowledged when using the end of life symbol on individual hospital resources.



The symbol does not reproduce well below a certain size. Avoid using it in applications where the diameter of the circle is less than 15mm. The symbol should always be used with one spiral 'arm' pointing up.



The symbol should be allowed 'room to breathe'. This can be achieved by allowing a suitable margin of space around the symbol, using the proportions indicated here as a guide.



The symbol should usually appear as a white symbol on a purple background. The symbol may also appear in purple on a white background. The colour reference for the symbol is Pantone 2597.



The end of life symbol is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivatives 4.0 International License. Please contact the Hospice Friendly Hospitals Programme before using the symbol on an end-of-life care or bereavement resource.

The symbol should not be used in place of the Hospice Friendly Hospitals Programme logo nor should it be used in advertising or promotional work.

For more information and advice please contact:

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