

# Deaths in the Community

Information and Advice for Relatives and Carers

Medical Examiner Service



The Patient Information Leaflets page on the Trust website is available on the link:  
<https://www.wwl.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets> or scan the QR code.

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## Introduction

This booklet is designed to provide practical advice and help during the last days/weeks of life and early days of bereavement.

We hope this booklet is of some help to you during the next few days. It is designed to offer practical advice and guidance, about who can help and where further information can be obtained, explaining procedures such as registering a death and arranging a funeral. If you are not sure what to do, please ask for help or support from any of the following people: Medical Examiner service, your GP or Social Worker. Funeral Directors are also very helpful, and they will guide you as much as they can.

## What happens when death occurs?

The days following bereavement can be very difficult. However, there are some formalities that must be dealt with promptly:

The death will be verified by a GP, District Nurse, Registered Nurse or the Out of Hours Service, if the death was expected, or if a Statement of Intent was issued by the GP. You can contact the funeral director of the family's choice to arrange collection and transportation of the deceased to their premises.

If the death was not expected, Paramedics will verify the death. They will contact the police in relation to a sudden/unexpected death and arrange for the deceased to be taken to the local hospital mortuary, and they will report the death to H M Coroner.

In the event of an expected death in the community, the process of how to obtain a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD), generally known as the Death Certificate, has changed following the instructions of the Medical Examiner Service.

## Arranging to see your relative / friend

If you wish to see your relative / friend, this will be at the Funeral Director's Chapel of Rest. Other friends and distant relatives, who may have not been present at the time of death, may also wish to pay their last respects. Please contact the funeral director directly to make these arrangements.

## Registering the death

The appointment to register the death will be face to face.

- The GP surgery, hospital or hospice will send the Register Office an electronic copy of the Death Certificate, along with the next of kin contact details.
- The Registrars will then call the next of kin by telephone to arrange an appointment to go and register. This will be either at Wigan Life Centre or Leigh Registry Office. They aim to register the death within 5 days of its occurrence.
- Following registration, the death certificates will be given to you and the necessary certificates for burial or cremation will be issued electronically to the relevant organisation/authority. This process will reduce the need for documents to be posted or hand delivered in person.

If the coroner has been involved or the informant has not been contacted by the Registry Office after 3 days of the doctor sending the Death Certificate, you can:

Request a call back for a telephone death registration by emailing:

[WiganRegisterOffice@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:WiganRegisterOffice@wigan.gov.uk)

### **Who can register a death?**

- A relative of the deceased
- Someone present at the death
- The person making the funeral arrangements (not the Funeral Director)
- Please note if English is not your first language, you may prefer to have someone with you to help

More information on registering a death is available at [www.wigan.gov.uk/Resident/Birth-Marriage-Deaths](http://www.wigan.gov.uk/Resident/Birth-Marriage-Deaths)

### **Tell Us Once**

As part of the registration process, you will be offered the Department of Works & Pensions (DWP) Tell Us Once service. This service will notify many different organisations that are signed up to the scheme making it easier and simpler to sort out the deceased persons affairs. If you do not wish to use this service, please advise the registrar on the day of your appointment. More information about the scheme, and any documents you may need to produce at the death registration appointment, can be found on the Wigan Council website: [www.wigan.gov.uk/Resident/Births-Marriage-Deaths](http://www.wigan.gov.uk/Resident/Births-Marriage-Deaths)

### **The Medical Examiner Service**

Medical Examiner offices at Acute Hospital Trusts now provide independent scrutiny of non-coronial deaths occurring in Acute Hospitals. The role of these offices is being extended to also cover deaths occurring in the community.

Medical Examiner offices are led by Medical Examiners, whom are senior doctors from a range of specialties, including general practice: they provide independent scrutiny of deaths not taken at the outset for coroner investigation. They put the bereaved at the centre of processes after the death of a patient, by giving families and next of kin an opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns. Medical examiners carry out a proportionate review of medical records and liaise with doctors completing the Death Certificate.

## What do medical examiners do?

Medical Examiners' conclusions can improve care for future patients. Their involvement also provides reassurance to the bereaved.

Medical examiners seek to answer three questions:

- What caused the death of the deceased?
- Does the coroner need to be notified of the death?
- Was the care before death appropriate?

Medical Examiners answer these by providing independent analysis, with three elements:

- They give a balanced review of relevant medical records
- They liaise with the doctor completing the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death
- They liaise with the bereaved, providing an opportunity to ask questions and to raise concerns.

## How medical examiners can benefit primary care

Medical examiners are already delivering benefits outlined in the **National Medical Examiner's 2020 report**, including fewer rejected Death Certificates, improved referrals to coroners, improvements to patient care, and positive feedback from certifying doctors and bereaved people. Potential benefits for GPs include:

### Supporting the bereaved and Death Certificate completion:

- Introduces rigour of independent scrutiny, reassures the bereaved/relatives of deceased patients
- This does not replace GPs speaking with families or next of kin, providing the support they wish to give.
- Support in drafting Death Certificates (and developmental opportunity to grow skills) and fewer Death Certificates rejected by registrars

## What happens when a death occurs in the community?

If the deceased person's death was expected and a Statement of Intent was in place, the GP will be asked by the Medical Examiner to provide a summary of care; this includes any contact with the patient, treatment/ care provided, and a medical history. The GP practice should contact you to advise you regarding the involvement of the Medical Examiner, and why they will be contacting you. This is nothing to be worried out and supports the process outlined in this leaflet.

## H M Coroner

The death will be reported to the coroner if it has resulted from, or occurred in any of these circumstances:

- The cause of death is not known or is uncertain.
- The deceased was not attended by a doctor during their last illness.
- The Doctor treating the deceased had not seen them either after death or in the 28 days prior to their death.
- The death occurred within 30 days of a procedure or treatment.
- The death was caused by an industrial disease.
- The death was violent, unnatural, or occurred under suspicious circumstances.
- The death of any baby or child under the age of 18.
- The death was drug or alcohol related.

The coroner may be the only person who can certify the cause of death. This link explains more about coroners and the types of deaths they investigate.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/notification-of-deaths-regulations-2019-guidance>

Your local Coroner's Office is based at Paderborn House, Howell Croft North, Bolton, BL1 1QY. They are available Monday to Friday 8:30am until 4pm telephone 01204 338799 or by email to [coroners@bolton.gov.uk](mailto:coroners@bolton.gov.uk)

You can also request information in other formats by emailing the Ministry of Justice at [coroners@justice.gov.uk](mailto:coroners@justice.gov.uk)

The medical examiner may sometimes give the coroner medical advice in these cases, but coroners lead these investigations.

### **Why am I being asked if I have any concerns?**

You are being asked if you would like to have a conversation with an independent, specially trained person – the medical examiner or a medical examiner officer – about anything that may be worrying you about how the deceased person was cared for. You may simply want to better understand why the person died, e.g. by having medical terminology explained, or you may want to raise something about the care which did not feel right or ideal. This is your opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns.

Medical examiners and medical examiner officers will discuss your feedback, questions, and concerns. If they consider that any issues with care need further investigation, they will refer these to someone who can do this work.

As well as answering your questions, talking to a Medical Examiner helps the NHS provide better care for other patients and carers in future.

## **Can I ask the medical examiner to talk to someone else if it's too difficult for me to talk to them?**

Yes, of course. The medical examiner or medical examiner officer may contact you to ask who you would like them to talk to instead, or you can let the medical team know if you would like someone other than yourself to be the first point of contact. The medical examiner or their office will usually phone you before the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death is completed – but we can arrange another way of contacting you if you let us know what you prefer.

## **What questions will I be asked?**

The medical examiner or medical examiner officer will explain what is written on the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death and why, and check if you have any questions or concerns. They will also discuss the medical examiner's review and ask if you have any concerns or questions about the care the person received before their death. This is the best time for you to ask any questions and raise anything that concerns you.

## **What if I don't want to talk to the medical examiner or medical examiner officer, or I don't want to tell them about my concerns?**

We understand this is likely to be a difficult time for you and it is your choice whether you talk to a medical examiner or not. If you are not sure, you can contact the Medical Examiner's Office on 01942 773654 or 01942 773595 and ask for more information before deciding if you want to go ahead – they are trained to help bereaved people and will be very understanding.

Medical examiners and medical examiner officers provide an independent view, so if you can, we encourage you to talk to them about your issues/concerns.

They can explain things to you and are specially trained to answer your questions. If Medical Examiners find any problems, they will be able to raise these with the people who were responsible for the care of the deceased or refer the problems to someone who can investigate further.

## **What will happen if something was not right?**

The medical examiner and medical examiner officer are here to listen to your concerns and answer your questions and, if necessary, contact someone who can investigate further. Medical examiners will not investigate further themselves, as they must complete their work in the time before the death has to be registered by law.

## **Will funeral plans or release of the body take longer?**

Medical examiners make every effort to avoid any delays, and work with families and carers of the person who died to meet the legal requirements for registering deaths. Medical examiners and medical examiner officers will try to be flexible, for example where relatives would like the body to be released quickly.

## **What can I do if I have questions or concerns about the medical examiner process?**

If you are not satisfied with the medical examiner's advice, please first discuss this with staff in the medical examiner's office, and if you are still not satisfied, you can also contact the Regional Medical Examiner through the National Medical Examiner Service by email to [nme@nhs.net](mailto:nme@nhs.net)

## **Medical Examiner Service contact information**

T. 01942 773654 Monday to Friday 8am until 4pm

E. [wwl-tr.medicalexaminer@nhs.net](mailto:wwl-tr.medicalexaminer@nhs.net)

W: [www.wwl.nhs.uk](http://www.wwl.nhs.uk)

## **Arranging a funeral**

The organising of a funeral can be done as soon after death as you feel comfortable. The deceased may have left instructions regarding their wishes for the funeral arrangements; you do not need to wait until you have registered the death. However, do not feel you have to rush, take time to think about what you want. Every family is different: you may wish to organise and arrange the funeral yourself, hold a Civil Funeral, or use a funeral director who will look after all the arrangements on your behalf.

Final funeral arrangements, such as a date for the funeral, should not be made until you have liaised with our Medical Examiner Service or the Coroner (if a post mortem is to be carried out).

You can find information about organising a funeral yourself via the internet, or the contact details of your local Funeral Directors, from your local telephone directory, or via the internet.

## **Funeral directors will manage the funeral arrangements and give advice and support**

These factors may influence your choice:

- Location of the firm's premises.
- Range of services provided.
- The way you are treated by the staff.
- Cost.
- Recommendation of those who have used the service.
- Ownership (small family business or large firm).

Remember, that with any funeral, a funeral provider only gets one chance to get it right. Don't be forced to make any decision with which you are uncomfortable.

## **Paying for the funeral**

If you are organising a funeral, you are responsible for paying the bill; you should check how you are going to pay for it. If you are finding it difficult to pay for a funeral, you may be entitled



to receive a Social Fund Funeral payment from the Department for Works and Pensions, providing you or your partner receive means-tested benefits.

<b>Useful Addresses and Telephone Numbers</b>	
<b>Local Support:</b>	
<b>Age UK</b> Pennyhurst Mill Haig Street Wigan WN3 4AZ <a href="http://www.ageuk.org.uk/wiganborough/">www.ageuk.org.uk/wiganborough/</a>	Tel: 01942 241972
<b>Department for Works and Pensions</b> <a href="http://www.gov.uk">www.gov.uk</a>	Tel: 0800 731 0469
<b>Wigan and Leigh Citizens Advice Bureaus</b> Wigan Life Centre The Wiend Wigan WN1 1NJ  Magnum House Suite 2.1 33 Lord Street Leigh WN7 1BY <a href="http://www.cawb.org.uk">www.cawb.org.uk</a>	Tel: 0808 278 7801
<b>The Samaritans Wigan</b> <a href="http://www.samaritans.org.uk">www.samaritans.org.uk</a>	Tel: 01942 492 222
<b>Wigan Family Welfare</b> Wigan Churches' Association for Family Welfare <a href="http://www.wiganfamilywelfare.co.uk">www.wiganfamilywelfare.co.uk</a>	Tel: 01942 867888
<b>Carers Loss &amp; Bereavement Counselling Service</b>	Tel: 01942 828771
<b>Stop Mail – Helping reduce junk mail</b> <a href="http://www.stopmail.co.uk">www.stopmail.co.uk</a>	Tel: 0333 240 0343

<b>Useful Addresses and Telephone Numbers</b>	
<b>National Support:</b>	
<b>Child Death Helpline</b> <a href="http://www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk">www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk</a>	Tel: 0800 282 986
<b>Cruse Bereavement Care</b> <a href="http://www.cruse.org.uk">www.cruse.org.uk</a>	Tel: 0808 808 1677
<b>Young Persons Freephone Helpline</b> <a href="http://www.hopeagain.org.uk">www.hopeagain.org.uk</a>	Tel: 0808 808 1677
<b>The Compassionate Friends (UK)</b> Supporting bereaved parents and their friends <a href="http://www.tcf.org.uk">www.tcf.org.uk</a>	Tel: 0345 123 2304
<b>Child Bereavement</b> <a href="http://www.childbereavement.org.uk">www.childbereavement.org.uk</a>	Tel: 0800 028 8840
<b>Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide</b> <a href="http://www.uk-sobs.org.uk">www.uk-sobs.org.uk</a>	Tel: 0300 111 5065

Please use this space to write notes or reminders.

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## Comments, Compliments or Complaints

The Patient Relations/Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) Department provides confidential on the spot advice, information and support to patients, relatives, friends, and carers.

## Contact Us

Tel: 01942 822376 (Monday to Friday 9am until 4pm)

The Patient Relations/PALS Manager  
Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust  
Royal Albert Edward Infirmary  
Wigan Lane  
Wigan  
WN1 2NN

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## Ask 3 Questions

Become more involved in decisions about your healthcare. You may be asked to make choices about your treatment. To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions:

1. What are my options?
2. What are the positives and negatives of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?



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## How We Use Your Information

For details on how we collect, use, and store the information we hold about you, please see patient information leaflet, Ref. **Corp 006** How we use your information, this can be found on the Patient Information Leaflets page on the Trust website, see details on the front cover.

This leaflet is also available in audio, large print, Braille, and other languages upon request. For more information, please ask in the department/ward.

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