



# The New Medical Examiner Service

## Patient information

At this time of sadness, we would like to offer our sincere condolences. The death of someone close to you, whether expected or sudden, is a distressing and confusing time. This booklet provides you with information about the Medical Examiner Service and the death certification process.

## What is the Medical Examiner Service?

The Medical Examiner Service has been developed and implemented as the result of several recommendations from key inquiries to provide greater scrutiny of all non-coronial deaths in England and Wales.

The Medical Examiner System's purpose is to:

- Provide next of kin with greater transparency regarding patient care and the death certification process and the opportunity to raise concerns
- improve the quality/accuracy of medical certificate of cause of death (MCCD)
- ensure that deaths are referred to the Coroner when appropriate
- provide an additional layer of safeguarding for the public through improved and consistent scrutiny of all non-coronial deaths whilst supporting healthcare providers to improve care through improved learning.

## Who are the Medical Examiners?

A Medical Examiner is a senior independent doctor who has received specialist training in the legal and clinical elements of the death certification process. As part of their role they:

- Advise on whether or not a death needs to be referred to the Coroner.
- provide advice to doctors on how best to certify a cause of death
- identify situations where an aspect of healthcare could be improved and feedback suggestions for possible future improvements.

Medical Examiner Officers work alongside the Medical Examiners. Medical Examiner Officers are not doctors, but they have undergone specialist training for their role and have experience of the healthcare and death certification system. It is a Medical Examiner Officer who will manage the case from its initial referral by the GP, to the Medical Examiner's Office, to its completion and they will act as the first point of contact for the next of kin.

The Medical Examiner team will contact the next of kin to help them better understand the cause of death and provide them with a chance to ask questions or raise concerns either about the cause of death or the care their loved one received before their death.

## Coroners

It is a legal requirement in certain circumstances that a death must be referred to the Coroner's Office. When a Coroner conducts an investigation, they will do so independently. However, the Medical Examiner may still provide the Coroner with expert medical advice.

Further information in relation to Coroners can be found on the Ministry of Justice website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-coroner-services-and-coroner-investigations-a-short-guide>

or you can e-mail: coroners@justice.gov.uk.

## **How and when will the Medical Examiner's Office contact you?**

A Medical Examiner Officer working alongside the practice will telephone you within a few days of them receiving the referral from the GP Practice. If the Coroner is involved and is investigating the death, then you can expect to be contacted by a Coroner's Officer instead.

If you are unavailable at the time of the call or it is inconvenient then please let the Medical Examiner Officer know and they will call you back at a time more convenient to you.

If you wish to have somebody else listed as the point of contact for the Medical Examiner's Office, then please let the GP know prior to them completing the referral or alternatively you can advise the Medical Examiner's Office of this when they contact you.

## **What questions will the Medical Examiner ask me?**

When the Medical Examiner's Office contacts you they will explain what is written on the medical certificate of cause of death (MCCD), what it means and will ask if you have any concerns or questions. This will give you the opportunity to ask any questions or better understand any medical terminology included on the certificate which you may find confusing or not be familiar with. You can not legally reject the doctor's opinion on the cause of death, but you can express your opinion on it if you disagree and your reasoning why. This will be taken into consideration and the cause of death may be reconsidered if new information is provided.

You will also be asked if you have any comments, good or bad, about the care the person received prior to death. This is an opportunity to raise any concerns you have related to the person's care. Depending on the nature of the concerns raised the Medical Examiner Officer can either escalate the concerns to the appropriate party or advise who to contact.

Following the conversation with the Medical Examiner Officer, the medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) will be completed by the GP and sent to the Medical

Examiner's Office. Once the Medical Examiner has approved the issuing of this certificate the Medical Examiner Officer will contact you to let you know that you can book an appointment at the Register Office for the Borough in which the person died.

## **Why are they asking if I have concerns?**

The discussion with the Medical Examiner's Office provides you with an opportunity to have an open and honest conversation with someone not involved in providing care to your loved one who died, including any concerns or worries you may have about the care they received.

It may simply be that you wish to understand more about the treatment and causes of death or better understand the medical language used, or it may be that there is something about the care which you think did not feel right. This is the opportunity to ask those questions.

As well as answering your questions, it can help to improve learning and provide better care for patients in the future by recognising ways in which care can be improved.

## **What if I don't wish to speak to the Medical Examiner Office?**

We understand that it is likely a difficult time for you and it is your choice whether or not to speak to a Medical Examiner Officer. There is still a legal obligation for the death to be reviewed by the Medical Examiner's Office, but you do not need to speak to them.

The Medical Examiner's Office provides an independent view, so if you can, it is encouraged that you talk to them. They will help explain what has happened and are specially trained to answer questions you may have.

If you do not wish to speak to the Medical Examiner's Office then please let your GP know ahead of the referral or advise the Medical Examiner Officer when they call.

## **Will this cause a delay in registering the death and arranging the funeral?**

The Medical Examiner Service makes 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. Each case will be reviewed individually and, where possible, the Medical Examiner's Office will try to give priority to those where next of kin need urgent release of the deceased, whilst ensuring due process is undertaken.

## **A summary of steps post death**

Step 1: Post death the GP will notify the Medical Examiner's Office (in the Borough in which the person has died).

Step 2: The Medical Examiner will review the death and contact the next of kin to discuss the proposed cause of death.

Step 3: Once discussed with the next of kin, the Medical Examiner's Office will send the required information back to the GP for them to complete the medical certificate of cause of death (MCCD).

Step 4: The GP scans and sends a completed MCCD to the Medical Examiner's Office. The Medical Examiner will then review the MCCD and approve it if completed accurately.

Step 5: MCCD is sent to the Registry Office by the Medical Examiner's Office and the Medical Examiner's Office calls the Next of Kin to notify them.

Step 6: The next of kin contacts the Registry Office to book an appointment to register the death.

## **What if I have questions, feedback or concerns about the Medical Examiner's Service?**

The Medical Examiner's Service is a new service that was implemented across England and Wales and became statutory for all non-Coronial deaths on the 9 September 2024. We are still working hard to improve the service and any feedback provided is welcome.

You can use the below email address to ask any questions and provide both positive and negative feedback about the service.

If you are dissatisfied with the Medical Examiner's Service, it is advised you discuss the concerns with them as the first point of contact.

Medical Examiner email address: [lnwh-tr.medicalexaminerqueries@nhs.net](mailto:lnwh-tr.medicalexaminerqueries@nhs.net)

However, if you are still not satisfied you can contact the Patient and Liaison Service (PALS) where staff will listen to your concerns and refer to the appropriate team to investigate.

Email: [LNWH-tr.PALS@nhs.net](mailto:LNWH-tr.PALS@nhs.net)

Telephone: 0208 869 5118

## Where is there further support?

### **CRUSE Bereavement Care**

Support, advice and information to children, young people and adults when someone dies. They offer face-to-face, telephone, email and website support.

Tel: 0808 808 1677

Email: [helpline@cruse.org.uk](mailto:helpline@cruse.org.uk)

### **Bereft Bereavement Support**

Bereft Bereavement Support was set up in 1999 to fill the need for specialist bereavement counselling and support for the adult residents (the over 16s) of the London Borough of Ealing

Tel: 0208 896 2899

Email: [bereftbereavementsupport@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:bereftbereavementsupport@hotmail.co.uk)

Web: [www.bereftbereavementsupport.co.uk](http://www.bereftbereavementsupport.co.uk)

### **National Bereavement Partnership**

The National Bereavement Partnership provides a support helpline, counselling referral and befriending service for all those suffering from bereavement, grief, living loss, mental health issues and those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tel: 0800 448 0800 (freephone)

Text Helpline: 0786 002 2814 (texts are charged at your standard rate)

Lines open every day: 7am to 10pm

Email: [helpline@nationalbereavementpartnership.org](mailto:helpline@nationalbereavementpartnership.org)