

## The New Medical Examiner Service Information for relatives and friends

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 following a number of recommendations from key inquiries to provide greater scrutiny of all non-coronial deaths in England and Wales.

The purpose of the Medical Examiner system is designed to:

- Provide bereaved families with greater transparency and opportunities to raise concerns
- Improve the quality/accuracy of medical certification of cause of death (Death Certificate)
- Ensure referrals to coroners are appropriate
- Provide the public with greater safeguards through improved and consistent scrutiny of all non-coronial deaths, and support healthcare providers to improve care through better learning

### Who are Medical Examiners?

Medical Examiners are senior independent doctors who have received specialist training in the legal and clinical elements of the death certification process. Their role includes:

- Advise on whether or not the law requires the coroner to be informed about a death
- Advise doctors on how best to certify the cause of death
- Identify situations where some aspect of healthcare could have been improved, and feedback suggestions for possible improvements in the future.

Medical Examiners are assisted by the Medical Examiners Officers, who are not doctors but have experience of the healthcare system and have had training for their role. They manage cases from initial notification through to completion and are essential for the effective and efficient working of the service.

Medical Examiners and Medical Examiner Officers offer next of kin's a chance to ask questions or raise concerns about the cause of death or about the care their loved one received before their death.

Whilst the Medical Examiner Services are hosted by acute hospital trusts they are independent bodies.

## The Coroner

Some deaths must be notified to the Coroner. When the Coroner starts an investigation, they will investigate the death independently – although the Medical Examiner may still provide expert medical advice to the Coroner.

Further information in relation to Coroners can be found on the Ministry of Justice website: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-coroner-servicesand-coroner-investigations-a-short-guide](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-coroner-servicesand-coroner-investigations-a-short-guide)

## How and when will the Medical Examiner service contact you?

One of the Medical Examiner Officers working alongside the practice will telephone you within a few days of your bereavement. If the Coroner is involved you can expect a call from the Coroner's Officer instead.

If it is inconvenient to take the call at that time, or if you would prefer a different member of your family to take the call, please let the Medical Examiner Officer know.

## What questions will I be asked when the Medical Examiner Service contact me?

The Medical Examiner Officer will explain what is written on the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death, what it means and will ask if you have any questions or concerns. Causes of death often use medical terminology which can be confusing so feel free to ask for an explanation. The law does not allow you to reject a doctor's opinion on what caused the death, but you can express your opinion if you disagree; the doctor involved might be persuaded to reconsider if you provide new information.

The Medical Examiner Officer will also ask if there are any comments, good or bad, about the care the person received before their death. This is the best time for you to raise questions and speak about anything that concerns you. Dependant on the nature of the concerns the Medical Examiner Officer can escalate these to the appropriate people to investigate. If this is the case, a Medical Examiner Officer will explain the process and what to expect.

Following this conversation, the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death will be completed by the GP and sent back to the Medical Examiner's service. The Medical Examiner Officer will then contact you and advise you to make an appointment to register the death and obtain the Death Certificate (that is needed to prove to banks, solicitors etc. that your relative/friend has died).

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

A discussion with the Medical Examiner Officer will provide you with an opportunity to have an open and honest conversation with someone who was not involved in providing care to your loved one who died, including anything about the care that may be worrying or of concern to you.

It could be as simple as helping you to understand more about the treatment and causes of death or to understand the medical language used, or there may be something about the care which did not feel right or ideal. This is an opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns. Medical Examiners and their staff will discuss your thoughts, questions and concerns, and if they find issues with care that need further investigation, they will arrange for this to happen. As well as answering your questions, this can help the NHS provide better care for other patients and carers in future.

The conversation with the Medical Examiner Officer is covered by the usual rules of medical confidentiality, but in some circumstances, it may be necessary to pass information to others in order to improve future care, protect other patients or satisfy the law.

### Can I ask the Medical Examiner Officer to talk to someone else if it is too difficult for me to speak with them?

Yes, please let your GP practice know who you would like to be the point of contact and this will be passed onto the Medical Examiner Service. Alternatively, you can discuss this when the Medical Examiner Officer contacts you.

### What happens if I do not want to speak to the Medical Examiner Officer?

We understand this is likely to be a difficult time for you and it is your choice whether you talk to a Medical Examiner Officer.

Medical Examiners and Medical Examiner Officers provide an independent view, so if you can, we encourage you to talk to them. They will help explain things to you and are specially trained to answer your questions.

If you do not wish to talk to a Medical Examiner Officer, please let your GP practice know or advise the Medical Examiner Officer, when they call.

### Will this cause delays in registering the death and making funeral arrangements?

The Medical Examiner Service makes every effort to avoid any delays and works with families and friends of the deceased to allow registering of deaths.

Medical Examiners and their team will try to be flexible, especially where relatives need access to the deceased, or release of the deceased quickly for cultural or religious reasons.

### What if I am dissatisfied with the Medical Examiner service?

The Medical Examiner system is a new service that is currently being implemented across England and Wales. The system was first implemented within acute hospitals, community hospitals and hospices, and finally rolled out to primary care. We are still trying to improve the service so your feedback will be welcome.

If you are not satisfied with the Medical Examiner Service, we advise you discuss this with the medical examiner's office as a first point of contact.

Email – [ekhuft.medicalexaminerofficers@nhs.net](mailto:ekhuft.medicalexaminerofficers@nhs.net)

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

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) Contact Details:

Telephone: [01227 783145](tel:01227783145)

Email: [ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net)

## Where can I get further information or support?

### **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](tel:08004480800) (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)

### **The Good Grief Trust**

An organisation run by the bereaved, for the bereaved.

Tel: [0800 2600 400](tel:08002600400) (10am-4pm Monday to Friday)

Website: [thegoodgrieftrust.org](http://thegoodgrieftrust.org)

### **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](tel:08088081677)

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

Visit: [Cruse.org.uk](http://Cruse.org.uk)

### **Stepping Stones Bereavement Service**

This is a free service available to all grieving families, some groups are available to anyone living in Kent who needs bereavement support, even if their loved one was not a patient of the hospice.

Please visit [Pilgrims Hospice website](http://Pilgrims Hospice website) for further information, and to download their support booklet.

Tel: [01233 504 127](tel:01233504127)

Email: [steppingstones@pilgrimshospices.org](mailto:steppingstones@pilgrimshospices.org)

### **Sudden Bereavement Support**

Sudden is a charitable service for people who have been bereaved by a death that happened suddenly or too-soon in someone's life.

This could be due to COVID-19 or another unexpected disease or undiagnosed medical reason, an event such as a work-place incident or terrorism, accident or suicide.

Sudden is also for people who are caring for suddenly-bereaved people.

You can contact the Sudden Bereavement Helpline on [0800 2600400](tel:08002600400) or [visit the Sudden website](http://visit the Sudden website) for further details of the support available