

Information for the bereaved

Royal Papworth
medical examiner office

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.

The medical examiner service

The medical examiner team includes medical examiners (MEs) and medical examiner officers (MEOs).

A medical examiner is a senior NHS doctor who has received specialist training in scrutinising the notes of a patient to establish the proposed cause(s) of death and identify cases that need to be referred to the coroner.

The medical examiner will discuss their scrutiny findings with the attending doctor/GP and together they will agree the cause(s) of death or make a referral to the coroner.

Medical examiner officers work alongside medical examiners to provide support with various tasks, including communicating with next of kin. The service offers the next of kin an opportunity to raise questions or concerns about the cause(s) of death, or about the care a person received before they passed away.

This will usually be through a telephone call. The medical examiner team can also explain the format of the death certificate and explain any medical language that you may not understand.

You can be confident that medical examiners and their staff will provide an independent view, as they will only scrutinise deaths where they have not been involved in the care of that patient.

The medical examiner and attending doctor may decide a case needs to be referred to the coroner, in which case the doctor will complete a referral to the coroner through an online portal system.

Coroners

When the coroner starts an investigation into a death, the coroner (not the medical examiner) investigates the death independently, though the medical examiner may still provide medical advice to the coroner.

Some deaths must be notified to the coroner – you can read about this on the internet:

[gov.uk/government/publications/notification-of-deaths-regulations-2019-guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/notification-of-deaths-regulations-2019-guidance)

You can also get the guidance in other formats by emailing the Ministry of Justice at **coroners@justice.gov.uk** (this is the part of the Government responsible for the guidance).

Why am I being asked if I have any concerns?

A discussion with a member of the medical examiner team provides you with an opportunity to have an open and honest conversation with someone who was not involved in providing care to the person 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.

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 their staff will try to be flexible, for example where relatives need access to the body, or release of the body quickly.

The Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD)

In order to register a death a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death is required, and if the death is not referred to the coroner, this will be issued by an attending doctor as soon as possible. A member of the team will contact you once this has been completed and help you to make arrangements to register the death.

How do I register a death?

Once an MCCD has been completed a death must be registered with the Registrar of Births and Deaths in Cambridgeshire. If possible this should be done within five days of the death.

An appointment for registration can be made once the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death has been completed by the doctor or issued by the coroner's office. To register, you will need to book an appointment online at: cambridgeshire.gov.uk

The following people can register a death:

- A relative of the deceased.
- The person who is arranging the funeral.
- A person present at the death

The death certificate is a certified copy of the entry in the death register and has to be paid for.

Purchasing additional copies can be useful as they are often required for sorting out financial affairs such as insurance policies, pension claims or bank accounts. You may qualify for the free **Tell Us Once** service which could reduce the number of copies you will need to purchase.

The registration office will advise you about this service during your appointment. When you register a death, the registrar will ask you for some information and this is listed below. It would be helpful if you could ensure that you have as much of this information as possible before your appointment. The registration takes approximately 20 - 40 minutes.

Information required to register a death:

1. Correct date and place of death.
2. Full name of the deceased, and any other names used by the deceased. For example, if a person's name was 'William' but he liked to be known as 'Bill'.
3. Date and place of birth.
4. Home address including postcode.
5. Marital state at time of death.
6. Occupation – think about how the deceased person would like to be remembered. The last job they had may not reflect what occupation they had for the majority of their working life.
7. Full name of spouse. This is still required even if their spouse has already passed away. This information is not required however if they were legally divorced.
8. Date of birth of spouse.

9. Occupation of spouse.
10. Name, address and phone number of chosen funeral director.
11. Burial or cremation, and where it is going to take place.
12. NHS number.
13. Was the deceased in charge of staff when employed. If yes how many?
14. If relevant: how long was the deceased in hospital? Was it over or under six months?

What the registrar will give you:

- A green certificate for notification of burial or cremation. You will need to give this certificate to the funeral director so that the funeral can take place.
- A death certificate. You may need extra copies of this certificate for pension and insurance purposes.

Funeral arrangements

We recommend that a family member or close friend contact a funeral director as soon as possible and it is a personal decision as to which funeral director's services they use. Most people use a local company as you will need to arrange an appointment to discuss the type of funeral you want.

Funeral Directors are very experienced in dealing with bereavement issues and they will do their best to guide you through this very difficult process. They will advise, assist and support you through the early stages of your bereavement and will deal with matters such as liaising with the mortuary, cemetery/crematorium, minister of religion and all other funeral arrangements. They will also inform you about funeral costs.

One of the first and most important decisions you will need to make is whether to choose a burial or cremation. You should check whether a will exists and whether any requests are in the will regarding burial or cremation. It is important for the funeral directors to know this decision as extra documentation has to be requested from doctors if cremation is chosen.

Organisations that may be able to provide further information or support

The Death and Bereavement section on the Government website

This provides information on what to do when someone dies, coroners and inquests, benefits payable after a death and also on jury service at inquests. This can be accessed at:

gov.uk/browse/births-deaths-marriages/death

Bereavement Advice Service

A free helpline and web based information service provided by Co-op Legal Services. Providing practical advice and information on the issues and procedures after a death: **bereavementadvice.org**

The Good Grief Trust

Exists to help all those suffering grief in the UK. Brings all bereavement services together around the country, to ensure everyone receives the support they need: **thegoodgrieftrust.org**

Cruse Bereavement Care

Provides support, advice and information to children, young people and adults when someone dies:

Website: **cruse.org.uk**

Cambridge: **01223 633536**

Norwich: **01603 219977**

West Suffolk: **01284 767674**

Ipswich: **01473 230888**

The Samaritans

Provides emotional support to anyone in emotional distress, struggling to cope, or at risk of suicide throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland: **samaritans.org**

SUDEP Action

Dedicated to raising awareness of epilepsy risks and tackling epilepsy deaths including Sudden Unexpected Death in Epilepsy:

Website: **sudep.org**

Tel: **01235 772850**

Ashley Jolly SAD Trust UK

Provides support and information for those who have lost a loved one suddenly and unexpectedly as a result of a cardiac condition. This may appear on the MCCD as sudden arrhythmia death syndrome:

Website: **sadsuk.org**

Helpline: **01277 230 642**

Email: **info@sadsuk.org**

Age UK Cambridgeshire

Tel: **0300 666 9860**

Norfolk: **01603 787111**

Suffolk: **01473 351234**

Jewish Bereavement Counselling Service

Access via: **jbcs.org.uk**

Tel: **020 8951 3881**

Muslim Bereavement Support Service

Access via: mbss.org.uk

Tel: **020 3468 7333**

Younger people

Winston's Wish

Supports bereaved children and provides specialist child bereavement support services across the UK, including in-depth therapeutic help in individual, group and residential settings:

Website: winstonswish.org

Helpline: **08088 020 021**

The Compassionate Friends

A charitable organisation of bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents dedicated to the support and care of other similarly bereaved family members who have suffered the death of a child or children of any age and from any cause:

Website: tcf.org.uk

Helpline: **0345 123 2304**

Sands

Stillbirth and neonatal death charity. They operate throughout the UK, supporting anyone affected by the death of a baby, working to improve the care bereaved parents receive, and promoting research to reduce the loss of babies' lives:

Website: sands.org.uk

Helpline: **0808 164 3332**

Other

Tell Us Once

A free Government service that lets you report a death to most government organisations in one go:

gov.uk/after-a-death/organisations-you-need-to-contact-and-tell-us-once

Citizens Advice

Provides free and confidential advice and information whoever you are and whatever your problem:

Website: **citizensadvice.org.uk**

Tel: **0800 144 8848**

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royalpapworth.nhs.uk



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View a digital version of this leaflet by scanning the QR code.



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