



## WORKING TO RAISE STANDARD IN BEREAVEMENT SERVICES

### Introduction of Medical Examiners and Reforms to Death Certification

Dear community,

We pray this letter reaches you all in the best of health and imaan.

This letter summarises the death certification reforms commencing on 9 September 2024, and how the statutory medical examiner system will operate when these reforms come into force.

The statutory scheme will have a huge impact on all deaths and associated funerals across the country including those at home or in a hospital.

#### What is a medical examiner?

Under the medical examiner's regulations, medical examiners provide **independent** scrutiny of causes of death and will be a contact for bereaved people who wish to ask questions or raise concerns.

Medical examiners are senior medical doctors who are contracted for a number of sessions a week to provide independent scrutiny of the causes of death, outside their usual clinical duties. They are trained in the legal and clinical elements of death certification processes.

Medical examiners, supported by medical examiner officers under delegation, carry out a proportionate review of medical records and give bereaved people the opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns.

The purpose of the medical examiner system is to:

- provide greater safeguards for the public by ensuring independent scrutiny of all non-coronial deaths
- ensure the appropriate direction of death to the coroner
- provide a better service for the bereaved and an opportunity for them to raise any concerns to a doctor not involved in the care of the deceased
- improve the quality of death certification
- improve the quality of mortality data

#### What does this mean for you

Whilst the changes in the death certification process are welcomed and a positive step forward as a whole. There will be an additional layer in the death certification process. If not managed proactively, this could lead to delays in completing the burial rites for you or your loved one.

The most important message we wish to stress to you, is the need for **early communication**.

When conversations are taking place around palliative and/or end of life care, it is extremely important to engage with your relevant funeral association.

The earlier your association is made aware, the earlier they can begin supporting you and your family for an expedited death certification process.

Whilst we fully understand and respect this a difficult time for you and perhaps a conversation you would not like to have, we cannot stress the importance of early notification.

If your associations are made aware of a death, once it has occurred, there will be very little chance of engaging all stakeholders to act quickly.

For those of you, who are not members of any funeral association, at the time of being notified of palliative and/or end of life care, you can notify the Pakistan Muslim Welfare Association (PMWA) via their [website](#) who will provide support.

**For those of you, who have families on palliative and/or end of life care right now, it is extremely important you communicate this now.**

### How will it work?

#### Hospital Deaths

Once a death occurs, a doctor who had treated the deceased is required to complete a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD), if they can propose a cause of death to the best of their knowledge and belief.

The MCCD is then referred to the Medical Examiner service.

The Medical examiner service complete proportionate scrutiny of the medical records of the deceased to establish if the proposed cause of death is in line with the medical history of the deceased, this will be prioritised to take place first within office hours, if the Medical Examiner team are made aware through the hospital that an early release is required.

If the Medical Examiner is satisfied with the proposed cause of death, the next of kin will be contacted by telephone to discuss the cause of death. This will give the family an opportunity to understand the cause of death and to ask any questions or raise any concerns if they wish to.

Remember, the Medical Examiner is **independent**.

Once the conversation with the next of kin has taken place, the Medical Examiner service will counter sign the MCCD and then email the document to the Registration Service.

At this point, they will also support with documentation to release the deceased.

It is incredibly important for families to be aware that out of hours release is not always possible, a number of different services are required to support early release, and this may not be possible on every occasion.

## Community Deaths

Once a death occurs, a doctor who had treated the deceased (in their lifetime) is required to complete a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD), if they can propose a cause of death to the best of their knowledge and belief.

The MCCD is then referred to the Medical Examiner service. It is important to note, IT systems differ from practice to practice, and this could be a short-term barrier in referring to the Medical Examiner service. It is currently taking between 2-5 working days for GP practices to refer community deaths to the Medical Examiner service. It is really helpful therefore if practices have already logged the family's religion in their electronic patient record.

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Remember, the Medical Examiner is **independent**.

Once the conversation with the next of kin has taken place, the Medical Examiner service will counter sign the MCCD and then email the document to the Registration Service. Usually, with expected community deaths, the deceased will have been taken by the appointed funeral director.

## What support do we have in place in Surrey

### Medical Examiner Services

We have engaged with all hospitals in Surrey to ensure there is some level of out of hours support.

Each Medical Examiner's service understands and is willing to support expedited completion of paperwork and early release to the best of their ability.

However, as mentioned above, each one of you has a key role to play in this. The earlier you communicate to the associations, the more support that can be arranged. It is also important to understand if the burial cannot take place until the next working day, there may not be a need to engage the Medical Examiner or other stakeholders out of hours.

### **GP Practices**

I am currently working with NHS and GP colleagues to formulate support for deaths which take place in the community, for which the support of a GP is required.

It is only fair to acknowledge, our GP practices are under significant strain and are asked to do more work which is unfunded.

It is therefore important we work with our GPs to identify suitable solutions that can be sustained for the future, which I hope to outline and share plans in the coming months.

### **Coroner Service**

We, alongside colleagues from the associations and the community hold regular quarterly meetings with the Senior Coroner and Area Coroner for Surrey.

These meetings have been crucial in rebuilding our relationship to ensure any matters that arise for the coroner service, or the community are addressed quickly and appropriately.

It is important to recognise that significant work takes place behind the scenes to ensure our needs as a community are met.

The coroner service continues to explore ways to provide digital post-mortems locally, which would be of significant benefit to us.

We hope to share further information in due course.

### **Surrey Registration Service**

Surrey Registration Service, has consistently for many years continued to support the needs of our communities and we are pleased to say, will continue to offer their support with the new medical examiner service.

Although, it is important to note, without either the Medical Examiner or the Coroner providing relevant paperwork to the Registration Service, they will not be able to carry out the registration.

### **Mortuaries**

We have a fantastic relationship with mortuary colleagues across Surrey. It is important to note that under the new system, mortuaries will not be able to release a loved one until the Medical Examiner scrutiny has been completed. Therefore, there is a risk that early release may be impacted.

Once again, the earlier the notification of a possible death is received, the earlier mortuary colleagues can be notified.

It should also be noted that the green form from the Registration Service is not a legal document for the release of a deceased from a mortuary. I am aware of one hospital in Surrey requesting this and conversations have taken place to address this matter.

## Updating your details with your GP

As part of the changes from 9 September 2024, the new MCCD will also record ethnicity of the deceased.

It is therefore important for you to ensure your details at your GP practice are correct.

Ethnicity must be self-declared and cannot be given by any other person apart from yourself.

In this case, the ethnicity that will be recorded on the MCCD will be taken from your GP/Hospital records.

If you are members of PMWA, a pre-populated form will be emailed to you.

Alternatively, a form has been provided on the [PMWA website](#), which once completed, will generate a PDF for you to print and hand to your GP. This can be used by anyone.

We would encourage you at this stage to also update your religion details, although religion will not be recorded on the MCCD, the National Burial Council, continue to lobby for these details to be included. Having religion updated could also help to expediate the transmission of paperwork.

Locally, the data that we can generate to show ethnicity and religion will aid conversations with stakeholders to ensure the needs of our communities are presented on an evidence-based basis.

## Conclusion

This is by far, the biggest reform in legislation impacting the death certification process since 1953 and we cannot stress the important role you play.

We appreciate, there is a significant amount of information to digest, the PMWA have therefore prepared a FAQ page on their [website](#), which will continually be added to, as we progress through this change.

As this is a significant change, PMWA have arranged a public meeting for the community:

**Date:** Sunday 29 September 2024

**Time:** After Zhur Salah (1.30pm)

**Venue:** The Shah Jahan Mosque, Woking, GU22 7BA

I'd like to thank PMWA for their continued support with these upcoming changes and facilitating changes to their websites as well as arranging the public meeting.

Yours sincerely,

Adeel Hussain

Regional Lead for London & the South of England - National Burial Council