Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Deaths in the Community

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Deaths in the Community

Information and Advice for Relatives and Carers

Medical Examiner Service

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Introduction

This booklet is designed to provide practical advice and help during the 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, North-West Ambulance service or the Out of hours service, if the death was expected and believed to be due to natural causes. You can contact the funeral director of the family's choice to arrange collection and transportation of the deceased to their premises. The deceased's GP will then refer to the Medical Examiner office. The Medical examiner office will not be aware of the deceased or be able to assist until they receive the formal notification from the GP.

If the death was not expected, paramedics will verify the death. They will contact the police in the first instance, who will advise as to whether they will be attending the death or not. If the police deem that there are no suspicious circumstances and that the death is due to potentially natural causes, the family can instruct a funeral director of their choice to transport the deceased to their premises. If the police deem that the death is unexplained or possibly due to unnatural causes, they will instruct that the coroner's removal team collect the deceased and transport the deceased to the local hospital mortuary. This death then falls under the remit of the coroner.

The process of how to obtain a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD), generally known as the Death Certificate, has changed, following the statutory requirement of the Medical Examiner service, which commenced on the 9th September 2024. Your nominated funeral director will provide initial guidance to you about this

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 or the local hospital mortuary. 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 or mortuary directly to make these arrangements.

The Medical examiner service

On the 9th September 2024, it became a legal requirement that when a death occurs the circumstances of death are independently scrutinised/reviewed by a coroner or Medical Examiner. In some cases, this can be both.

Medical Examiner offices are led by Medical Examiners, who 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 regarding 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

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 they will 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 0300 707 3654/3595/3567 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, it is encouraged that 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

Medical Examiner service contact information

T. 0300 707 3654 / 3595 / 3567 Monday to Friday 8am until 4pm

E. wwl-tr.medicalexaminer@nhs.net

W: www.wwl.nhs.uk

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 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, whose death is unexpected or unexplained.
- The death was drug or alcohol related.
- The death occurred in state detention (Policy Custody, Prison, Bail Hostel or detained under Mental Health)

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 by telephone 01204 338799 or by email to coroners@bolton.gov.uk

You can also request information in other formats by emailing the Ministry of Justice at coroners@justice.gov.uk

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

Registering the death

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

- Upon receipt of the electronic Death Certificate, the Medical Examiner office will notify the Register office 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. The death is to be registered within 5 working days of the electronic Death Certificate being sent by the Medical Examiner office.

- Following registration, the death certificates will be given to you and notification will be provided to the funeral director by email. This process will reduce the need for documents to be posted, or hand delivered in person.

If the coroner has been involved and they have advised that the details are with the Medical Examiner, you must wait to hear from the Medical Examiner office, who will provide you with further advice and information

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

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 person's 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

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 postmortem 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. It is important you contact the Department for Works and Pensions as soon as possible, as the process to receive any Social Fund Payments can take anything up to 6 weeks or more.

Wigan and Leigh Residents Funeral Services

There is also a Wigan and Leigh Residents Funeral Service is handled by professional funeral director partnership of Carl Hogg and Susan Fields Funeral Service with Walkers Funeral Service.

The service is available to anyone who is arranging the funeral of someone who has died whilst residing in the borough of Wigan. These Funeral Directors can arrange a fixed price funeral as follows:

How much is it?

The service is a fixed price so you know exactly what you will need to pay:

- Cremation £2,381.10
- Burial £2,650.10.

(The 2024 national average cost of a funeral is £4,141).

What do you get?

The service will be held at Wigan Crematorium or any of the borough's nine cemeteries.

It includes:

- Collection of the deceased (from within the borough)
- Use of the funeral director's chapel of rest (for families where transport is unavailable a collection service is available to visit the chapel of rest by arrangement). Visits to the chapel of rest are available:
- Arranging and supervising the funeral
- Hearse and one following limousine to carry six
- A suitable oak (or similar) finished coffin, with engraved nameplate, interior and appropriate handles
- Cremation costs/burial costs
- Additional costs such as having the clergy of your choice for the crematorium or grave side service.

It does not, however, include discretionary costs such as flowers or an obituary in the paper.

Additional services

The partnership of Carl Hogg and Susan Fields Funeral Service with Walkers Funeral Service can offer further services such as

- Embalming
- Additional limousines
- Obituaries and acknowledgement notices
- Floral tributes
- Memorial inscriptions.

Any extra items requested will incur additional costs and the funeral directors will provide an estimate of these on request.

Contact

Call The partnership of Carl Hogg and Susan Fields Funeral Service with Walkers Funeral Service directly on:

- Carl Hogg and Susan Fields Funeral Service Colliery Cottage, 49 Heath Street, Golborne, WA3 3BS - 01942 318001
- Walkers Funeral Service ours is 217 Ormskirk Road, Newtown, Wigan, WN5 9DN - 01942 231426.

If you wish to use this service please ask for the Wigan and Leigh Residents Funeral Service.

Useful Addresses and Telephone Numbers

Local Support:

Age UK Pennyhurst Mill Haig Street Wigan WN3 4AZ www.ageuk.org.uk/wiganborough/	Tel: 01942 241972
Department for Works and Pensions www.gov.uk	Tel: 0800 731 0469

Wigan and Leigh Citizens Advice Bureaus Wigan Life Centre The Wiend Wigan WN1 1NJ Magnum House Suite 2.1 33 Lord Street Leigh WN7 1BY www.cawb.org.uk	Tel: 0808 278 7801

The Samaritans Wigan www.samaritans.org.uk	Tel: 01942 492 222
Wigan Family Welfare Wigan Churches' Association for Family Welfare www.wiganfamilywelfare.co.uk	Tel: 01942 867888

Carers Loss & Bereavement Counselling Service	Tel: 01942 828771
Stop Mail – Helping reduce junk mail www.stopmail.co.uk	Tel: 0333 240 0343

Useful Addresses and Telephone Numbers

National Support:

Child Death Helpline www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk	Tel: 0800 282 986
Cruse Bereavement Care www.cruse.org.uk	Tel: 0808 808 1677
Young Persons Freephone Helpline www.hopeagain.org.uk	Tel: 0808 808 1677

The Compassionate Friends (UK) Supporting bereaved parents and their friends www.tcf.org.uk	Tel: 0345 123 2304
Child Bereavement www.childbereavement.org.uk	Tel: 0800 028 8840
Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide www.uk-sobs.org.uk	Tel: 0300 111 5065



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