Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Guidance and Support for the Bereaved

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Guidance & Support for the Bereaved

Patient Information

Bereavement Services

Introduction

This booklet is designed to provide practical advice and help during early days of bereavement. May we offer our sympathy to you, your family and your friends during this very sad time. If you need help in any way, please do not hesitate to ask. If you wish, the Nurse in Charge can arrange for you to talk to the Mortuary Staff involved in the care of your loved one, after leaving the ward.

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; it also outlines 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: Bereavement Services Officer, Ward staff, Hospital Chaplains, your GP or Social Worker. Funeral Directors are also very helpful, and they will guide you as much as they can.

The days following bereavement can be very difficult, but there are formalities that must be dealt with promptly. If you have any requests or concerns, please contact the following services.

- Mortuary Services Tel: 0300 707 2000 (8:00am to 12:30pm and 1:00pm to 4:00pm Monday to Friday).
- Bereavement Services Tel: 0300 707 2524 (10:00am to 12:30pm and 1:00pm to 4:00pm Monday to Friday).
- Medical Examiner’s Office, Officers Tel: 0300 707 3654 (enquiries only). (8am to 4:00pm Monday to Friday)
- Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care Team Tel: 0300 707 2324.
- Bereavement Liaison Specialist Nurse for Bereavement and Donor Support via Tel: 0300 707 3548 (answerphone facility).

Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care

Our Chaplains provide pastoral, emotional, spiritual and religious support, a listening ear and a safe space to be able to talk. They are available 8am – 10pm, 7 days a week for people of all faiths, beliefs and none. In an emergency, they can be paged via the switchboard on 01942 244000. On call R.C. Priests are available 24 hrs a day, 7 days a week, via the switchboard on 01942 244000

If you would like to speak to a Chaplain, please ask any member of staff to contact the Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care Team. For non-urgent referrals, a message can be left on 0300 707 2324 or 0300 707 2314. For ongoing support after a death, please contact the Chaplains to arrange an appointment either on site, virtually or over the telephone: 0300 707 2324.

Bereavement Nurse

The Bereavement Nurse is a Registered Nurse who is available on the telephone or by appointment to talk through things, and offer ongoing support to recently bereaved families, especially those whose relatives have died in our hospital. The Service is mainly available Monday to Friday 8am to 4pm. Outside these hours, please leave a message on the answer machine. For further information, please contact Bereavement Liaison Specialist Nurse on 0300 707 3548

Tissue Donation

Almost anyone can be considered for tissue donation, although donation needs to take place within 24 - 48 hours of death. Patients can donate tissues such as skin, tendons, bone, heart valves and eyes, to help save and improve the lives of over 50 people. Unlike organ donation, you don’t need to die in a hospital Intensive care unit or Emergency department to donate tissue after death.

You may receive a telephone call from a Tissue Donation Specialist Nurse to discuss the subject of tissue donation, within a few hours of your relative’s death; this is if the Specialist team believe your loved one could be in a position to be able to donate. If you would like further information, please call 0800 432 0559 and leave a message. If however, a patient has died in circumstances where organ donation may be possible, this option is always discussed with families at a hospital if the patient is suitable. If you want to be an organ donor, your family’s support is needed for organ donation to go ahead.

What happens next?

- Your loved one will be cared for by the small team working in the mortuary. The mortuary at Royal Albert Edward Infirmary is a small facility, and during busy periods, your loved one may be moved to Leigh Infirmary mortuary, where there is the same care provided by the small team; this is until your chosen funeral director is able to transfer your loved one into their care.

- Bereavement services will contact you as soon as possible on the first working day following the bereavement of your relative; this will be to gather some basic information which will be required by the Medical Examiner's Office.
- A member of the Medical examiner team will contact the next of kin. They will then explain the cause of death. They will go through the contents of the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) and ask if you are in agreement. You will have an opportunity to ask further questions should you wish to do so.
- You may contact the Bereavement Service by ringing 0300 707 2524 after 10am on the next working day for any advice you may need. Please do not attend the Bereavement office in person.
- Discuss funeral arrangements with your relatives/friends. If there is to be a postmortem examination, you can still contact your chosen funeral director, who will guide you through the process once you inform them that HM Coroner is involved.
- Any property/personal items belonging to your relative/friend should have been returned to you before you left the ward; if not, please contact the ward to arrange collection. Valuables such as jewellery and cash that have been handed over for safekeeping can be collected from the General Office at Wigan Infirmary between 9am and 4pm (Monday to Friday); you will require identification to do this.

Information which may be helpful to you

Appointments

You may wish to use the chart below as a guide for appointment times you have made.

Appointment Information	Date of Appointment	Time	Done
Bereavement Liaison Specialist Nurse			
Register Office			
Funeral Director			

Arranging to see your relative

The mortuary at RAEI is in a separate building, situated to the rear left of the hospital. It has a private room (not a Chapel of Rest), which is used for both viewings and identifications. The room provides a private space for immediate next of kin only who were unable to be present at the time of death. Viewings are available by appointment only; this will be arranged with the next of kin. To arrange a viewing, please contact the Mortuary Service direct on 0300 707 2000 during working hours. Viewings are available Monday to Friday (excluding Bank Holidays), usually between 1:00pm and 3:45pm. Each viewing will be no longer than 15 minutes. Other family members and friends are asked to pay their respects at the Funeral Director's Chapel of Rest. Please note that Leigh Infirmary Mortuary does not have viewing facilities.

Medical Examiner's Office

The Medical Examiner Service was rolled out across the NHS in England from 2019 with the aim of improving death certification and putting bereaved families and friends at the centre of the process. It provides an opportunity for the bereaved to ask questions about the cause of death, and to discuss the care that their friend or relative received prior to their death.

A Medical Examiner is an independent senior consultant/doctor working at the hospital, whose job it is to ensure the information contained on the MCCD is accurate, and that referrals to the coroner are performed in a timely and appropriate manner. The aim of the service is to:

- provide bereaved families with clear information, and give them the opportunity to raise concerns or ask questions
- improve the quality/accuracy of MCCD
- ensure referrals to coroners are appropriate
- support local learning/improvement by identifying matters in need of clinical governance and related processes
- 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
- align with related systems such as the Learning from Deaths Framework and Universal Mortality Reviews.

You can find further information regarding the Medical Examiner Service on the Trust web site.

Registering the death

The Medical Examiner Service will send the MCCD electronically to the Registrar's Team. They will also send...

Guidance & Support for the Bereaved

Registering a Death

The Registrar's Team will require your name and contact details. If the coroner has been involved, they will produce the relevant documentation and send it electronically to the Register Office. The coroner will also advise you when they have done this. Until the Registrar's Team receive the MCCD or coroner documentation, they are unable to complete the registration or offer an appointment.

Once the Registrar's Team have received all the relevant documentation, they will contact you by telephone to book you an appointment to attend the Register Office to register the death. The Registrar's Team will aim to contact you within one working day of receiving the MCCD or coroner documentation. Please do not contact the Registrar's Team, they will contact you.

Wigan and Leigh Register Office

Wigan and Leigh Register office have appointments available Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm (excluding Bank Holidays). To complete a death registration, you can attend:

- Wigan Life Centre
- Leigh Life Centre

Who can register a death?

- A relative of the deceased
- Someone present at the death
- Partner of the deceased
- The person making the funeral arrangements
- Personal Representative of the deceased (Solicitor, 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/BirthMarriage-Deaths

Tell Us Once

As part of the telephone 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

How H M Coroner can become involved

If the death is referred to H M Coroner, in some instances, there is a legal requirement for the doctor to refer a death to the H M Coroner. If you have any questions about a death being referred to H M Coroner, the Bereavement Service staff will discuss and explain the procedure in detail.

What does the coroner do?

A coroner makes enquiries into the deaths that are reported to them. It is their duty to find out the medical cause of death, if it is not known, and to enquire about the cause of death if it was due to violence or was otherwise unnatural. The coroner will instruct the doctor to issue a MCCD if there is a known natural cause of death, or instruct a post-mortem where a cause of death cannot be provided. If the post-mortem provides a natural cause of death, the coroner will issue a MCCD; an inquest will be held where an unnatural cause of death is provided, and interim paperwork will be issued so that a funeral may take place prior to the inquest.

Are all deaths reported to the coroner?

No. In most cases, the deceased's own GP, or hospital doctor who has been treating the deceased, is able to give a cause of death. Deaths are usually reported to the coroner by the police or by the hospital doctor who has been treating the deceased. A GP will also

report an unexpected death to the 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 deceased was not attended by a doctor during their last illness.
- The doctor treating the deceased had not seen them either after death or in the 28 days prior to their death.
- The death occurred whilst a patient was undergoing an operation, did not recover from the anaesthetic, or has died within 30 days of the procedure.
- The death was caused by an industrial disease.
- The death was violent, unnatural, or occurred under suspicious circumstances.
- The death is drug or alcohol related.

The coroner may be the only person who can certify the cause of death.

H M Coroner's Office

Greater Manchester West
Paderborn House
Civic Centre
Howell Croft North
Bolton BL1 1JW
Telephone: 01204 338799

Medical and nursing staff, paramedics, and police may be present to observe as part of their training, or to further develop their professional skills. Consent is not required for this; if you have any objections, you may contact the mortuary, and your wishes will be respected.

Arranging a funeral

The organising of a funeral can be done as soon after death as you feel comfortable, even with H M Coroner involvement. When you appoint your chosen funeral director, you will be asked to sign a mortuary authorisation form to say they are acting on your behalf; this will be used to collect your loved one from the mortuary. 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 Bereavement Service Office or the Coroner, if a post-mortem is to be carried out.

You can find information about organising a funeral yourself via the internet, or via contact information for your local Funeral Directors (phone directory/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. Do not 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 that you must arrange, you may be entitled to receive a Social Fund Funeral payment from the Department for Works and Pensions, provided you or your partner receive means-tested benefits.

Who needs to be told about the death?

You will probably want to let family, friends, and neighbours know of the death right away. There are several other people who may also need to know, if not notified when registering the death. These are:

- Family doctor
- The Benefits Agency (pensions, benefits)

- The Bank, Giro, Credit Cards, Building Society
- Social Services (home help, home care)
- Schools, Colleges or University attended
- Place of work (occupational pension)
- Executors of the Estate (wills)
- Solicitor
- Insurance Companies (Life, Car etc)
- HM Revenue & Customs
- Electricity, Gas, Telephone, Water Companies
- Dentist / Optician
- The Bereavement Register (reduce unwanted mail – see useful contacts)

Things that will need to be returned

- Pension / Benefit Books
- Driving Licence
- Passport
- NHS Equipment on Loan
- Drugs and Medication to your local or hospital Pharmacy
- National Insurance Card
- Blue Badge Parking Disc

Children and grief

We often protect children from the facts of death. Children of all ages feel grief and distress, and we often underestimate a child's resources and ability to cope. Talk to children as soon after a death as possible, be open and honest with them, explaining facts in a simple manner, using appropriate words such as dead, rather than asleep. It is helpful to be open with children and share feelings of sadness; by doing this, children will learn that it is natural to be sad and to cry when someone dies. Children often like to draw pictures or write stories as part of their way of saying goodbye.

Dealing with grief

Feelings following bereavement

There are no right or wrong ways to grieve. We all need to grieve in our own way and in our own time. There is no set timescale for the grief process as every one of us is a unique individual. Reactions and feelings can change from hour to hour or day to day, and normal daily events such as a specific smell or song can trigger a grief response. Some of the most common...

Guidance & Support for the Bereaved

Feelings

- **Shock and disbelief** It can take quite some time for the bad news to sink in. You can't believe it, not at first, it’s like a dream, it’s not real.
- **Loss** You've lost so much - the person, their love, their friendship, their companionship, their hopes, and this can produce a deep sense of sadness.
- **Guilt and regret** You may regret not saying or doing something you feel should have been said or done. You can be regretful for feeling angry. Some will feel ‘survivor guilt’ - being alive when another is dead. If the death was unexpected or sudden, feelings of regret and guilt could probably be heightened. You might also feel shame, or blame yourself.
- **Injustice** Why did they have to die? Why did this have to happen to me? It's not fair.
- **Envy** You might envy others for having what you don't have - the partner, parent, child or friend you have just lost. You could also envy others for their apparent carefree lives.
- **Anger** You might feel angry with the world or with people for: causing the death, not being able to cure the illness, not understanding your feelings, making thoughtless remarks or carrying on with life and having fun. You might feel angry with yourself too, for what you did or did not do. But perhaps most difficult of all, you might feel angry with the dead person for dying and abandoning you and for the pain you are suffering as a result of their death.
- **Loneliness** Grieving can be a lonely process. You may feel that no-one can possibly understand what you are going through, or that no-one cares.
- **Depression** Feeling low is a natural part of the mourning process. For a time, you could lose interest in life and feel that there's no point in going on. At worst you might feel despair.
- **Relief** You might feel relieved, especially if the death followed a long illness or if the person's quality of life had deteriorated.

Physical effects following a bereavement

Grief also affects our behaviour and functioning. You may find it affects you in some or all the following ways:

- **Sleep disruption** You may find that you can't get to sleep or can't stay asleep or that you wake early.
- **Loss of appetite** You might not feel like eating, or you may feel sick when you do.
- **Exhaustion** Grief is stressful, and if you are also not sleeping or eating well, you are bound to feel tired and worn down.
- **Restlessness** You may find it hard to concentrate or relax and 'switch off'. Your mind can go into overdrive trying to make sense of what has happened.
- **Anxiety and panic** With so many powerful and unfamiliar feelings aroused, you might become anxious and panicky. These can lead to such bodily responses as palpitations of the heart, excessive sweating, nausea and digestive problems.
- **Inability to cope** You might find it difficult to cope with ordinary, everyday things like shopping, cooking, study or work.
- **Loss of interest** Things that were once a source of pleasure to you now feel meaningless and tiresome.
- **Irritability** You might find yourself ‘snapping,’ even if you are not the sort of person who normally reacts in this way.
- **Tearfulness** You might cry a lot; in fact, sometimes it's all you can do. Crying can help.

Helping yourself

- Reducing the impact of grief by acknowledging that it is normal to feel ‘not normal’.
- Ensuring that you are clear with what did happen, rather than relying on what you believe to have happened, can help.
- Talking about your grief to friends or family members can help; sometimes it’s not always easy to talk to those closest to you, for fear of expressing your emotions, upsetting them or even being a burden to them.
- The Bereavement Liaison specialist nurse is also available to contact, to offer further ongoing help/support/information. Telephone: 0300 707 3548 (messaging service available out of hours).

Useful Addresses and Telephone Numbers

Local Support:

- Age UK Wigan Borough, 74-80 Hallgate, Wigan WN1 1HP www.ageuk.org.uk/wiganborough/ Tel: 01942 615880
- Citizens Advice Wigan Borough Wigan Life Centre North, Magnum House, Leigh www.cawb.org.uk Tel: Advice line 0808 2787 801 Monday – Friday 9am – 5pm
- The Samaritans of Wigan www.samaritans.org.uk Tel: 116 123 free 0330 094 5717 local charges apply
- Wigan Family Welfare www.familywelfare.co.uk Tel: 01942 867888
- Wigan and Leigh Carers Centre wlccarers.com 01942 697885
- Stop Mail – Helping reduce junk mail www.stopmail.co.uk Tel: 03330068114

National Support:

- Tel: 0800 282 986
- Child Death Helpline www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk
- Cruse Bereavement Care www.cruse.org.uk Tel: 0808 8081677
- Young Persons Freephone Helpline part of Cruse www.hopeagain.org.uk Tel: 0808 808 1677
- The Compassionate Friends Supporting bereaved parents and their friends www.tcf.org.uk Tel: 0345 123 2304
- Child Bereavement UK www.childbereavementuk.org Tel: 0800 028 8840
- Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide www.uksobs.com Tel: 0300 111 5065
- Department for Works and Pensions www.gov.uk Tel: 0800 731 0469 Bereavement support payment



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