

## Medical Examiner Service

Information for Bereaved Relatives

### **Who are Medical Examiners and Medical Examiner Officers?**

Who are Medical Examiners and Medical Examiner Officers? Since 2019 senior NHS doctors have had the opportunity to receive specialist training and spend some of their time working as Medical Examiners at the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust. Alongside other specially trained staff, their job is to give independent advice into causes of deaths; except for deaths which have to be reviewed by a Coroner.

The Medical Examiners ensure that all deaths are reviewed by someone who is independent and who was not involved in the patient's care. The Medical Examiner will work with the GP to ensure that the information contained on the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD), is correct and that referrals to the Coroner are made, if necessary, in a timely and appropriate manner to avoid delays.

Medical Examiners and their staff (usually called Medical Examiner Officers) offer families and carers an opportunity to raise questions or concerns about the cause of death of a loved one or about the care they received beforehand. This will usually be done over the phone and, if required, a meeting can be arranged.

A key role of the Medical Examiner is to make it easier for the bereaved to understand the wording on the Medical Certificate which explains the cause of death. Medical Examiners also look at the relevant medical records and discuss the causes of death with the doctor completing the MCCD.

### **Coroners**

Some deaths must be notified to the Coroner. When the Coroner starts an investigation, he or she 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, as the government are responsible for the guidance. Alternatively, you can e-mail: [coroners@justice.gov.uk](mailto:coroners@justice.gov.uk)

### **What questions will I be asked when the Medical Examiner's Office contact me?**

The Medical Examiner or their staff will explain what is written on the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death and what it means and will ask if you have any questions or concerns.

They will also discuss the Medical Examiner's review and ask if there are any concerns or questions 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.

You will have the opportunity to ask further questions, if you wish to do so. In instances, where the Medical Examiner will not be able to answer your questions immediately, the Medical Examiner will assist in seeking answers, as appropriate, and advise you about sources of additional support available.

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

A discussion with a Medical Examiner or their staff provides you with an opportunity to have an open and honest conversation and address any worries or concerns with someone who was not involved in providing care to the person who died.

It could be as simple as helping you to understand more about the treatment and cause/s of death or to understand the medical language used. There may be something about the care which you think did not feel right; this is an opportunity to ask questions.

The Medical Examiner will provide an independent view of causes of death and the care provided. Medical Examiners and their staff will discuss your thoughts, questions and concerns and if they find issues with care that need further investigation, will refer these on.

As well as answering your questions, this can help us to provide better care for patients, their families and carers by recognising ways in which care can be improved in the future

### **Can I nominate someone else to talk, if it is too difficult for me?**

Yes, the Medical Examiner or their staff may contact you to ask who you would like us to talk to instead, or you can let the medical team know if you would rather appoint someone else as a first point of contact.

The Medical Examiner or Medical Examiner Officer will usually contact you by phone, however, we can make other arrangements if you let us know.

### **What if I do not want to speak to the Medical Examiner or their staff or I do not want to tell them about my concerns?**

Medical Examiners are independent, so we would like you to speak to them or their staff, if possible. They will help explain things to you and are specially trained to answer your questions.

However, we understand this is a difficult time for many people and so speaking to someone is completely your choice. If you are not sure, you can contact the Medical Examiner or their staff on:

**Telephone: 01902 695942 / 01902 445863 / 01902 444072**

**Email: [rwh-tr.medicalexaminerservice@nhs.net](mailto:rwh-tr.medicalexaminerservice@nhs.net)**

They can give you more information which will help you decide if you want to go ahead – they are specially trained to help people during difficult times and will be very understanding and supportive of your wishes. If Medical Examiners find any potential issues, they will be able to raise these with people responsible for the care of the person who died or refer the issues on to someone who can investigate further. Speaking with the Medical Examiner and Medical Examiner Officers can help improve the care provided by the NHS to other patients and carers in future. The Medical Examiners Office may share anonymised feedback to practices to provide learning and improve quality of care provision

### **What would happen if something was not right?**

The Medical Examiner and Medical Examiner Officers are here to listen to your questions and concerns, provide answers if possible and, if necessary, pass them on to someone who can investigate further.

Medical Examiners will not investigate further themselves, as they must complete their work within set time limits for the death certification process.

### **Will funeral plans or release of the body take longer?**

We make every effort to avoid any delays and work with families and carers to meet the legal requirements for registering deaths and, therefore it is not anticipated that the funeral plans or release of the body will take longer.

### **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, we suggest you discuss this with staff from the Medical Examiner's office in the first instance. If you are still not satisfied, you can contact either:

Patient Advice and Liaison Service team Telephone: 01902 695362

Email [rwh-tr.PALS@nhs.net](mailto:rwh-tr.PALS@nhs.net)

The GP Practice that issued the death certificate.

### **How can I contact the Medical Examiner office?**

You can contact the Medical Examiner office either by phone or email: Telephone: 01902 695942 / 01902 445863 / 01902 444072

Email: [rwh-tr.medicalexaminerservice@nhs.net](mailto:rwh-tr.medicalexaminerservice@nhs.net)

The opening hours are Monday – Friday, 9:00am–5:00pm