

The new Medical Examiner service Information for recently bereaved relatives

Who are Medical Examiners?

Medical Examiners are senior doctors who are independent of the healthcare professionals who looked after the person who died recently. They have received training to help them to:

- Advise on whether or not the law requires the coroner to be informed about a death
- Advise doctors on how best to certify the cause of death
- Identify situations where some aspect of healthcare could have been done better, and feedback suggestions for possible improvements in the future.

Medical Examiners are assisted by the Medical Examiners Officers, who are not doctors but have experience of the healthcare system and have had training for their role.

The Medical Examiner system is currently being implemented across England and Wales. It is now running in most hospitals, but along with community hospitals and hospices yours is one of the first General Practices to implement the system. We are still trying to improve it so your feedback will be welcome.

Whilst the Medical Examiner Services are located in acute hospital trusts they are independent bodies.

How and when will they contact you?

One of the medical examiners linked to this practice will telephone you within a few days of your bereavement, unless the coroner is going to investigate the death. If the coroner is involved you can expect a call from the Coroner's Officer instead.

If it is inconvenient to take the call at that time, or if you would prefer a different member of your family to take the call, please say so. But delaying the call may delay the process of registering the death, which should be completed within 5 days of death wherever possible.

What will they ask about? What can I say?

The medical examiner will first tell you what has been proposed as the cause of death, to go on the death certificate. You will be asked if it is what you expected and if you need any explanation.

Causes of death often use medical terminology which can be confusing. Feel free to ask for an explanation. The law does not allow you to reject a doctor's opinion on what caused death, but you can express your opinion if you disagree; the doctor involved might be persuaded to reconsider if you provide new information.

You will be offered an explanation of the next steps in registering the death and obtaining the Death Certificate (that is needed to prove to banks, solicitors etc. that your relative has died).

The medical examiner will then ask you if you have any comments, good or bad, on the healthcare provided to your deceased relative; or if you think there is anything that ought to be investigated further. Your comments, good or bad, will be fed back to the members of staff involved, if the

medical examiner thinks it appropriate to do so. The medical examiner will not be able to guarantee that any action will be taken, but he/she has a duty to pass on serious or persistent problems to the Regional Medical Examiner or the Coroner, who will decide what action is appropriate.

The conversation with the medical examiner is covered by the usual rules of medical confidentiality, but in some circumstances it may be necessary to pass information to others in order to improve future care, protect other patients or satisfy the law.

Where can I get further information or support?

If you have questions about the illness or the treatment of your relative, the medical examiner is a senior doctor and may have sufficient knowledge to be able to help you. However, medical examiners are not specialists and they may need to explain how you can seek answers to specialist medical questions.