

National Medical Examiner update

April 2022

Welcome

As a new financial year begins, we can reflect on significant progress being made across England and Wales, as medical examiners continue to work with colleagues across all health settings to extend scrutiny to all non-coronial deaths. This is a significant and complex undertaking, and I recognise the challenges. Often there are obstacles to overcome. However I am hearing many examples where medical examiners and colleagues across health providers are working in partnership to deliver benefits for bereaved people and to inform learning and improved care. Progress towards the statutory medical examiner system is also continuing, as the [Health and Care Bill](#) has completed its third reading in the House of Lords.

I look forward to seeing many of you at the second medical examiner conference on 18 May 2022. I would like to extend my thanks to the Royal College of Pathologists for arranging this, and for their continuing support to medical examiners, including through their ongoing training for medical examiners and officers, and publication of the National Medical Examiner's Good Practice Series. I am pleased to report two further publications since my last update . My thanks again to the Royal College of Pathologists who worked with the Judicial College to run five very successful joint coroner and medical examiner training days helping build constructive working relationships with coroners.

Dr Alan Fletcher, National Medical Examiner

What's included in this update

- Coronavirus Act: death certification and registration
- New good practice papers
- Health and Care Bill update
- Medical examiner case management system
- Medical Certificate Cause of Death Digitisation
- Implementation in Wales
- Training and events
- Contact details

Coronavirus Act: death certification and registration

As mentioned in our previous update, [requirements for death certification and cremation forms](#) changed with expiry of the Coronavirus Act on 24 March 2022.

Many helpful changes introduced by the Coronavirus Act have been carried forward, including seeing the deceased 28 days prior to death rather than 14 days, and sending MCCDs to Register Offices electronically. The provision for any medical practitioner to complete an MCCD in times of emergency has been discontinued, and medical practitioners completing MCCDs must satisfy requirements set out in General Register Office guidance around attendance and seeing the deceased. The requirements for form Cremation 4 are the same as for MCCDs.

Official guidance from the [General Register Office/ HM Passport Office](#) and [Ministry of Justice](#) has been updated.

New good practice papers

The National Medical Examiner has issued two more good practice papers for medical examiners, published by the [Royal College of Pathologists](#). They cover [post-mortem examinations](#), and [deaths of children](#). We are grateful to all those who have participated in discussions and contributed to drafting these papers. In coming months, we plan further papers on mental health and eating disorders; anti-microbial resistance; homelessness; and dementia.

Health and Care Bill update

The 3rd reading of the Health and Care Bill in the House of Lords was completed on 23 March 2022, and consideration of amendments commenced on 30 March 2022. The bill will amend the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 to allow NHS bodies to appoint medical examiners instead of Local Authorities in England, and Welsh NHS bodies instead of only Local Health Boards in Wales. Subject to parliamentary process, we do not expect the statutory medical examiner system to be introduced before Summer 2022.

Implementation in Wales

The medical examiner service in Wales is now routinely scrutinising around 80% of appropriate deaths from the acute care sector, along with a growing number of those occurring in non-acute care settings. Operational management arrangements continue to be developed linking outputs with the wider clinical quality and patient safety agenda across Wales, using the Wales digital system. This allows feedback to the bereaved, analysis and reporting, and case work can be shared across all four regional offices when required.

As care providers transition to a different phase of COVID-19 response, roll out of the electronic access to patient records is continuing in acute and non-acute sectors. This will be matched with an increase in staffing levels to our full complement over the coming months to ensure that the expected legislative timeframe can be met with a workforce that is able to meet the increased demands.

The mix of medical examiner and medical examiner officer backgrounds, their growing knowledge and experience, and their independence from the providers of care, is facilitating an open and honest approach that is highly valued by bereaved people and professional stakeholders. This will be further enhanced in due course by the creation of a stakeholder reference panel to sit alongside a service board in a revised governance structure.

Medical examiner case management system

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has commissioned NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA) to develop a national case management system for medical examiners and medical examiner officers in England, 'Medical Examiner Service - Manage My Caseload'. NHSBSA are building the system based on requirements from DHSC, the National Medical Examiner and medical examiner offices. NHSBSA are currently testing the system with a number of medical examiner offices in NHS acute trusts, with the feedback from these settings is informing system improvements.

Medical Certificate Cause of Death digitisation

DHSC has also commissioned NHSBSA to develop a digitised Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD). DHSC is working with stakeholders including all relevant government departments and Welsh Government. It is anticipated that the digitised MCCD will be introduced not before Summer 2022. If your role involves completing MCCDs and you are interested in supporting the user research, please contact nhsbsa.researchops@nhs.net.

Training and events

Currently, more than 1,500 senior doctors have completed medical examiner training, and 360 staff have completed medical examiner officer training. Further [sessions](#) are planned and medical examiner training will alternate between being held in person at the Royal College of Pathologists (7 June will be the first) and virtually via Zoom. Medical examiner officer training will continue to be held virtually via Zoom

The second annual conference for medical examiners will be held on 18 May 2022 via Zoom. Registrations can be made [here](#).

Contact details

We encourage you to continue to raise queries with us and share your thoughts on the introduction of medical examiners, through the [contacts list](#).

The page contains contact details for the national medical examiner's office, the medical examiner team in Wales, and regional medical examiner contacts in England.

Further information

Further information about the programme, including previous editions of this bulletin, can be found on the [national medical examiner](#) webpage.

NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership also has a web page for the [medical examiner system in Wales](#).

© NHS England and NHS Improvement April 2022