

National Medical Examiner update

August 2019

Welcome

We have continued to make good progress since the last bulletin. I am particularly pleased to have appointed excellent medical examiners for each region in England, and the lead medical examiner for Wales (details below). We will all be meeting in September to start planning regional implementation. I am very grateful to everyone who applied for these important roles.

We have also started recruitment for seven regional medical examiner officers in England and the lead medical examiner officer for Wales, to provide vital support, co-ordination and guidance for regions and local offices. You can find more details of these roles below – and please pass on to anyone you think may be interested.

I was pleased that so many people came to our medical examiner workshop at the Patient Safety Congress in Manchester on 2 July 2019 where NHS Improvement and NHS England launched the [NHS Patient Safety Strategy](#). There is clearly enthusiasm across the country for implementing the medical examiner system, and we had a lively discussion around some key principles to bear in mind as we implement it. Firstly, medical examiners need to carry out genuinely independent scrutiny to give families and carers confidence that all concerns are considered carefully. Although medical examiners will be employed by trusts in England or health boards in Wales, they will have a separate line of accountability to regional/lead medical examiners. Secondly, it is really important that we fully engage patients, their families and carers as our work progresses.

Of course, people also want to understand the practical details about medical examiners, such as how the system will operate. We are finalising details now before writing to medical directors. Our next bulletin will be out in September.

Dr Alan Fletcher, National Medical Examiner

What's included in this update

- Regional medical examiners and lead medical examiner for Wales
- Recruiting regional medical examiner officers and lead medical examiner officer for Wales
- Medical examiner training
- Medical examiner system in Wales
- Setting up local medical examiner offices
- Children's Funeral Fund for England
- Notification of deaths regulations

Regional medical examiners and lead medical examiner for Wales appointed

We are delighted to announce the appointment of the lead medical examiner for Wales and regional medical examiners for all seven NHS regions in England (subject to internal governance approvals). Details are listed below with their key specialty areas:

- East of England: Dr Ellie Makings (anaesthetics and intensive care)
- London: Dr Mette Rodgers (genitourinary and HIV medicine)
- Midlands: Dr Ben Lobo (consultant physician and geriatrician)
- North East and Yorkshire: Mr Graham Cooper (cardiothoracic surgery)
- North West: Dr Huw Twamley (critical care)
- South East: Dr Zoe Hemsley (geriatrics)
- South West: Dr Golda Shelley-Fraser (histopathology)
- Wales: Dr Jason Shannon (pathology)

Recruiting regional medical examiner officers and the lead medical examiner officer for Wales

We are now recruiting for seven regional medical examiner officers in England and a lead medical examiner officer for Wales. These roles will support regional medical examiners and the lead medical examiner for Wales to work with providers to establish and implement local medical examiner systems. They will develop links and ensure good communications with local medical examiner offices and with organisations across health and social care, including primary care, secondary care, voluntary and independent sector providers, and other stakeholders.

Wales have advertised the lead medical examiner post and are shortlisting for interview.

The closing date for all 7 Regional posts is 1st September 2019 and the links to the adverts are below:

[London](#) - interview date 11th September in London

[South West](#) - interview date 12th September in London

[Midlands](#) - interview date 16th September in Derby

[South East](#) - interview date 17th September in London

[North West](#) - interview date 19th September in Liverpool

[North East & Yorkshire](#) - interview date 25th September in Leeds

[East of England](#) - interview date 30th September in Cambridge

Please pass these details on to people who may be interested in applying and have appropriate skills and experience.

Medical examiner and medical examiner officer training

We are encouraged by the enthusiastic response to training available for medical examiners and medical examiner officers. Health Education England published new medical examiner modules on [e-Learning for Health](#) in November 2018. More than 6,000 people have registered for the modules and 406 people have completed all 26 core modules.

The Royal College of Pathologists provides [interactive face-to-face training days](#) in Cardiff, Leeds and Birmingham, as well as London', which 241 people have also now completed as the second part of their training. A further 165 people have registered to attend training in coming months. Please continue to identify and encourage appropriate people in your organisation to attend these training events.

Thanks to this training there is now a growing community of medical examiners, and 113 qualified medical examiners have joined the Royal College of Pathologists.

Medical examiner system in Wales

The implementation of the medical examiner system in Wales will closely mirror the timescales and funding arrangements in England.

Consultation on proposals for Wales identified broad support for the general principle of a 'once for Wales' approach, to fit with existing arrangements. The Welsh medical examiner system is being set up through the NHS Wales Shared Service Partnership (NWSSP). Medical examiners and medical examiner officers will be employed by NWSSP and initially hosted at acute hospital sites within local health board areas, and will have a separate professional line of accountability to the lead medical examiner for Wales. This introduces an additional layer of independence to the medical examiner role, which will be developed to ensure synergy with the [universal mortality review](#) process and as part of the wider clinical governance and patient safety system.

Andrew Evans has been appointed Programme Director in NWSSP to drive forward the implementation in NHS Wales, following the recent appointment of the Lead Medical Examiner for Wales, Jason Shannon, also employed by NWSSP.

With key appointments now in place, NWSSP is finalising the governance and operational structure and will set up an implementation board to take this forward with the NHS and key stakeholders.

Setting up local medical examiner offices

We know that many trusts in England and NWSSP in Wales have either introduced or are in the process of implementing a medical examiner system. We are working on some good practice guidelines for local medical examiner offices informed by learning through pilot and early adopter sites. We hope to let you know more about this in September. We recognise the importance of consistency of medical examiner office work, and the good practice guidelines will facilitate this.

A key benefit of the role of medical examiners is providing opportunities for families and carers to express any concerns about care. We are thinking about how to involve patient and family representatives in national and local medical examiner structures, and we encourage NHS providers to do the same while they develop and implement the local medical examiner system.

Children's Funeral Fund for England

The Children's Funeral Fund for England (CFF) was implemented on 23 July 2019. Under the CFF arrangements, the cremation or burial of a child under the age of 18 or a baby stillborn after 24 weeks' pregnancy is free to parents, and burial and cremation authorities will claim fees directly from the CFF.

The CFF also covers certain expenses that can be claimed by a funeral director, including the fees for completion of medical cremation forms, where these are charged. Medical practitioners charging for the completion of any of the medical cremation forms should continue to receive these fees as a disbursement from the funeral director, who will be able to apply to the CFF for reimbursement. Where a funeral director is not used, the bereaved family will be able to apply to the CFF for reimbursement of the medical cremation forms.

All child deaths (up to age 18) will be exempt from the cost associated with the medical examiner system, including the existing medical cremation form fees.

Bereaved families asking for further information can be directed to www.gov.uk/child-funeral-costs. If they need help making a claim, they can call freephone 0808 196 1759 (outside UK +44 1633 630904) or email cff@sscl.gse.gov.uk.

Arrangements in Wales

Similar arrangements were put in place in Wales to cover costs for the burial and cremation of children in 2017 through the provision of a grant to local authorities. The impact of almost two years of funding fees for child burials in Wales will be reviewed later this year and alongside further support families may need at this sad time.

Further information on the current arrangements in Wales can be found here: <https://gov.wales/fees-child-burials-or-cremations-guidance-local-authorities>

Notification of deaths regulations

In its response to the 2016 consultation, [*Introduction of Medical Examiners and Reforms to Death Certification in England and Wales*](#), the government committed to creating a statutory duty on medical practitioners to report deaths to the coroner in certain circumstances. We are working closely with the Chief Coroner's Office and consider this an excellent opportunity to improve consistency of referrals of deaths to the coroner.

The Notification of Deaths Regulations 2019 have now been laid in parliament and will come into force on 1 October 2019. Under these [regulations](#), medical practitioners will have a duty to report deaths where they are unable to ascertain the cause of death, the cause of death is unnatural, or the death occurred in custody or state detention. The regulations also place a duty on medical practitioners to report deaths to the coroner where no attending practitioner is required to sign a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD), an attending practitioner is required to sign a MCCD but they are

unavailable, or the identity of the deceased is unknown. The Ministry of Justice will be publishing guidance to accompany the regulations before they come into force.

National Medical Examiner's office

We encourage you to continue to raise queries with us and share your thoughts on the introduction of medical examiners:

- for general enquiries: nme@nhs.net
- for enquiries about the National Medical Examiner's diary: Helen Hill, helen.hill6@nhs.net
- for enquiries about implementation: Nick Day, nickday@nhs.net

In Wales

- for enquiries about implementation in Wales: Andrew Evans, Andrew.evans@nhs.wales.uk

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 webpage on the medical examiner system in Wales: www.nwssp.wales.nhs.uk/medical-examiner-service