

National Medical Examiner update

December 2020

Welcome

As 2020 draws to a close, it is worth reflecting on the outstanding progress we have made in implementing the medical examiner programme. Of course, 2020 brought challenges far beyond those most of us anticipated, and this goes to make our achievements as a medical examiner community all the more remarkable.

We established national teams in England and Wales to support medical examiner offices to get up and running. With that support and the hard work of local teams, all health boards in Wales now have a medical examiner office; and in England the final few acute trusts yet to complete the establishment of medical examiner offices should do so shortly. During 2020, medical examiners also rose to the challenge of starting to provide independent scrutiny where health and social care workers died with Covid-19.

There are many positive developments, but above all, I am delighted that the significant and beneficial impact of medical examiners for bereaved families is starting to be seen. One medical examiner remarked of a family “they valued the call and explanations...we have allowed them to find more complete closure on their bereavement.” I am profoundly grateful to colleagues across England and Wales who worked so hard to make all this possible despite the challenges of the pandemic.

Of course, there is more work to do. Medical examiner offices take time to develop capacity and establish their working arrangements, but we should take pride together in how far we have come. We can look ahead to 2021 with optimism, I am sure we will build on our achievements and further develop our support to our colleagues, patients and their families.

Dr Alan Fletcher, National Medical Examiner

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Medical examiners' annual conference

The first Medical Examiners' Annual Conference will be held (via Zoom) on 27 April 2020 and will focus on progress with implementation and plans for the future. The event is likely to be of interest to medical examiners and officers, those involved in death certification, coronial referral, improving patient care or supporting the bereaved. Places can be booked through the [Royal College of Pathologists' website](#).

Moving to a statutory medical examiner system

Department of Health and Social Care remains committed to making the medical examiner system statutory subject to parliamentary approval and when time allows. We anticipate the non-statutory system will continue throughout the financial year 2021-22, and will keep you informed of progress.

Improved working with registrars

We are very grateful to colleagues in the General Register Office Compliance and Performance Unit, and the National Panel for Registration, who shared with us their Annual Performance Report for 2019/20. This notes the positive impact of non-statutory medical examiners, with fewer deaths registered with coronial involvement, and deaths registered with no coronial involvement increasing by 6.3% compared to the previous year. The report also notes increasing accuracy of Medical Certificates of Cause of Death (MCCDs), which is one of the expected benefits of medical examiners, and should mean fewer MCCDs are rejected.

This positive progress forms a good foundation for further gains through work in partnership with registrars, as medical examiner offices become more established and increase their

capacity and the number of deaths scrutinised.

Implementation in Wales

The medical examiner service for Wales, having now opened all four regional offices, is testing and adapting systems and processes. Medical examiners have scrutinised deaths from both primary and secondary care, and are already starting to see the benefits emerging. There are plans to review cases from hospices and community hospitals before the end of this year.

The service has established links to mortality review teams within health boards to ensure that learning or feedback identified during medical examiner scrutiny can be passed on to the care provider for further consideration or review. It is also assisting in standardising mortality review processes throughout Wales.

This will be aided considerably with the digital transfer of clinical notes, which is a priority for development during the next few months.

Quarterly reporting in England

Thank you to the many medical examiner offices that submitted 2020/21 Quarter 2 data using our new online process, particularly given the considerable pressure trusts are under. The national team have started to review the data, which will help us to evaluate progress towards achieving the objectives of the medical examiner system.

Thanks also to everyone who completed our experience survey – this information will be very useful for us to improve the collection and experience over time.

After considering feedback, we clarified some descriptions, and added two fields to the scrutiny categories. We kept changes to a minimum to limit the impact for medical examiner offices. Changes are highlighted in yellow in the annex of the updated [guidance](#).

The 2020/21 Quarter 3 data is due to be submitted between 1 January and 22 January 2021 via the online [portal](#). Information on how to access the portal has been sent previously. Please contact reporting.nme@nhs.net if you have any queries.

Funding for acute trusts in England

Most medical examiner offices in England should have received funding confirmation letters setting out agreed reimbursement for activity from 1 October 2020 to 31 March 2021. These will have been sent to the lead medical examiner and medical director. Please contact funding.nme@nhs.net for further information.

As noted in previous bulletins, reimbursement for the period 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2020 will be covered through the temporary COVID-19 financial arrangements (trust-level block and retrospective top-up process) and medical examiner offices should have made arrangements for this with their trust finance teams.

Training and events

Zoom training for both medical examiners and medical examiner officers continues to be a great success and we are extremely grateful to Dr Suzy Lishman, Daisy Shale and the meetings team at the Royal College of Pathologists, for making the events so successful.

The total number of medical examiners trained is just over 900, and by February 2021 this total should reach 1,000.

To date, around 150 medical examiner officers have been trained, with 47 booked on training next year on 9 February and 25 March. The feedback on these sessions has been overwhelmingly positive.

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](#).