

Practical help and support for relatives and friends following the death of a loved one

Royal Shrewsbury Hospital
Bereavement Office: 01743 261384



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Introduction

On behalf of all the staff in the Trust we would like to offer our deepest sympathy to you and your family at this very difficult time. We also appreciate that following the death of a loved one there are a number of practical issues that need to be dealt with straight away and we hope that this booklet will help you.

The booklet will provide you with advice about the following:

- How and where to obtain the Medical Certificate of the Cause of Death
- How and where to collect belongings and valuables
- Advice about post-mortems and the Coroner
- How to arrange a funeral
- How to register a death

The second part of this booklet will aim to give you some ideas for help and emotional support that many people need over the weeks and months to come. It may help you to understand some of the emotions which are normal for people to feel whilst grieving and coping with the loss of a loved one.

Dealing with the immediate practicalities

What needs to be done?

- Obtain the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death
- Collect any belongings or valuables
- Register the death at the Register Office – this should normally be done within 5 days
- Arrange a funeral, usually via a Funeral Director

Other things to consider

- You may wish to arrange to visit your loved one
- Whether you want a burial or cremation
- You may wish to talk to someone about your feelings
e.g. Hospital Chaplain

- You need to make a list of various authorities to inform them of the death
- You may wish to contact support agencies

Other useful information can be found in the Department of Work and Pensions publication called “What to do after a death” from the Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths or via the website on www.gov.uk.

In some instances there is a legal requirement for the doctor to refer a death to the Coroner, which may result in a post-mortem examination. If you have any questions about a death being referred to the Coroner, the doctor or member of the Bereavement Team will discuss and explain the procedure in more detail.

What to do next

The bereavement service staff will endeavour to telephone you within 24 hours of being notified of the death, except public holidays and weekends when you will be contacted the next working day. If you have any concerns/queries please feel free to contact the bereavement service after 11am on the next working day on the number on the front cover of this booklet. The Bereavement Officer will advise you on progress with completion of the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) and the role of our Medical Examiner. The Officer will explain what happens next and advise the process for collecting the MCCD when it is ready and inform you of how you can access our on-site Registrar.

Medical Examiner Service and the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death.

The Royal Shrewsbury Hospital Bereavement Office now provides a Medical Examiner service which is a national system for reviewing deaths that occur in hospital. This service consists of senior level medical practitioners and support staff that have been independent from the care your loved one received. The Medical Examiner reviews all deaths within the hospital in order to establish a cause of death prior to issuing a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD).

The identified next of kin will receive an initial telephone call from the Medical Examiner or a qualified Medical Examiner Officer, the nature of which is to discuss the nursing care, medical treatment and provisional cause of death of your relative/loved one. This is a chance for you to ask any questions you may have regarding any aspect of their hospital admission and advice will be given to you as to how this can be taken forward. During this initial contact, the Medical Examiner Officer may enquire about funeral arrangements for your relative and any special cultural considerations that need to be addressed. Following this, you may wish to raise any questions about how next to proceed and our officer will assist you in any way they are able. Following this telephone conversation the Medical Examiner will instruct for the treating doctor to write the MCCD.

Once the MCCD has been completed, you will be contacted again by telephone from the Bereavement Officer and invited to make a mutually convenient appointment with the Bereavement Office to arrange for its collection. The Royal Shrewsbury Hospital Bereavement Service does offer an on-site Registration Service to allow you to officially register the death of your relative/loved one. Our bereavement staff will discuss this option with you when they make contact to arrange for collection of the certificate.

The service does endeavour to provide you with the certificate within 1-2 days after your relative/loved one has died, however, in some circumstances this can take a little longer. In some cases, the Medical Examiner or treating doctor may need to speak to the Coroner before proceeding and when that happens, a short delay may occur before we can issue the certificate. In either situation we will, of course, keep you informed of this. If the death has been reported to the Coroner, you will be advised of what will happen next.

Registering the death

Once you have collected the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death you can register the death. This is a legal requirement and should be done within 5 days (unless the death has been reported to the Coroner) and usually in the district Register Office where the death occurred, irrespective of where the person normally lived. The death cannot be registered without a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death.

How to register the death

In partnership with Shropshire County Council Registry Service, the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital provides an on-site Registrar Service on the following days:

Monday PM

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday PM

Friday

When our Bereavement Service staff contact you to advise you that the MCCD is ready for collection, subject to availability, they will offer you an appointment to register the death at the same time as collecting the MCCD.

This appointment will be arranged by Bereavement Service staff and cannot be made by contacting the Shirehall. Alternatively, if you would prefer, you can register the death at the Shirehall in Shrewsbury, details of how to do this are below.

Registrar's Address:

Registrar of Births & Deaths

Shirehall

Abbey Foregate

Shrewsbury

SY2 6ND

Please ring for an appointment: 0345 678 9016

Who can register the death?

- A relative of the deceased
- Someone present at the death
- The person making the funeral arrangements – this does not have to be a Funeral Director

What needs to be taken to register the death?

- The Medical Certificate of Cause of Death
- The deceased's medical card (NHS card), if available
- The deceased's birth certificate, if available
- The deceased's marriage or civil partnership certificate, if appropriate and available

What will the Registrar need to know about the deceased?

- Their full name and surname (and maiden name, where appropriate)
- Their date and place of birth (town and county if born in the UK and country if born abroad)
- The date and place of death
- The last usual address of the person
- The occupation, or last occupation, if retired
- The name and occupation of their spouse or civil partner, if applicable
- Whether the deceased was receiving a pension or allowance from public funds
- If the deceased was married, the full name and date of birth of the surviving widow, widower or civil partner

The Registrar will give you:

- The Death Certificate: this is a copy of the entry in the Death Register. You may need one or more Death Certificates for the will and for any pension claims, insurance policies etc. These are available for a fee. Further copies can be obtained at a later date, if required.
- A Certificate of Burial or Cremation: this is a 'green form' which enables you to arrange a funeral. This should be given to your Funeral Director as early as possible.
- A Certificate for the Department of Work & Pensions (BD8 form) Registration or Notification of Death: this may need to be sent to the Department of Work & Pensions and is provided free of charge. Read the information on the back of the certificate and if it applies, fill in the certificate and post or take it to your local Department of Work & Pensions Office (Jobcentre Plus Office).

Deaths reported to the Coroner

Coroners are usually lawyers and sometimes doctors. Coroners are independent judicial officers – this means that no-one else can tell them or direct them what they should do, but they must follow the laws and regulations that apply. Coroners are helped by officers who are investigators who usually have a police or medical background. These officers receive the reports of deaths and make enquiries on behalf of the Coroner.

The Coroner has a duty to find out the medical cause of death, if it is not known, and to enquire about the cause of death, if it was due to violence, or industrial disease or was otherwise unnatural.

How are deaths reported to the Coroner?

Deaths are usually reported to the Coroner by the police, or by the doctor who has been treating the deceased. A doctor will also report an unexpected death to the Coroner.

The death will be reported to the Coroner if it resulted from, or occurred in any of these, and sometimes other circumstances:

- The cause of death is not known or is uncertain
- The deceased was not attended by a doctor during their last illness
- The doctor treating the deceased has not seen them either after death or in the 14 days prior to the death
- The death occurred whilst a patient was undergoing an operation or did not recover from the anaesthetic
- The death was caused by an industrial injury or disease
- The death was violent or unnatural or occurred under suspicious circumstances
- The death occurred as a result of violence, neglect or abortion, or any kind of poisoning
- The Coroner may be the only person who can certify the cause of death

What will the Coroner do?

The Coroner may decide that the death was quite natural and will allow a doctor to issue a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (the Coroner's Officer may contact relatives directly to discuss this). If not, the Coroner may ask a Pathologist to examine the body by means of a post-mortem examination. If the result of the post-mortem examination shows the death to have been due to natural causes, the Coroner will issue the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death and this will be sent to the Register Office directly. The Coroner will advise you once this certificate has been issued and you may then make an appointment to register the death at the Register Office.

What if the death was not due to natural causes?

If the death is not due to natural causes the Coroner will hold an inquest. An inquest is an inquiry to find out exactly who had died, and how, when and where they died, together with information needed by the Registrar of Deaths so that the death can be registered. Because there will be a delay before a full Death Certificate is available, the Coroner will usually issue an interim Death Certificate, which is accepted by most banks and building societies. The Coroner may also issue a burial or cremation order so that the funeral can take place before the inquest.

Further information may be obtained from the following website
www.homeoffice.gov.uk

Arranging a funeral

You do not have to wait until you have registered the death before contacting a Funeral Director. Funeral Directors are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and the earlier they become involved, the sooner they will be able to act on your behalf. However, the final arrangements for the funeral should not be made until you are sure the death does not have to be referred to the Coroner. If the death has been referred to the Coroner, his office will advise you what to do. Your Funeral Director will liaise with the Coroner for you. If a post-mortem examination is required, then the date of the funeral may be affected. You will also need to consider what type of funeral your loved one would have wanted and whether they have left any instructions about this.

Alternatives to traditional funerals

There are more options concerning the content of a funeral ceremony and its duration than many people realise. The majority of people choose to make their arrangements through a Funeral Director, but some people see “do-it-yourself” funerals as more personal and less expensive. If this approach appeals and you have time to research and prepare, enquire at the cemeteries and crematorium department of your local authority for guidance. You could also get information from the Natural Death Centre (www.naturaldeath.org.uk) helpline – 01962 712690.

Choosing a Funeral Director

Funeral Directors will manage funeral arrangements and give advice and support. Check if the Funeral Director you choose belongs to a trade association. This requires them to provide full information about their services and prices. These factors may influence your choice:

- Location
- Range of services provided
- Cost
- The way you are treated by the staff
- Recommendation of those who have used the services
- Ownership (small family business or large firm)
- A simple funeral

Most people would probably require the Funeral Director to provide the following services as a minimum:

- Make all the necessary arrangements
- Provide appropriate staff
- Provide a suitable coffin
- Transfer the deceased from the place of death to the Funeral Director’s premises
- Care for the deceased prior to the funeral
- Arrange for burial or cremation
- Embalming, viewing or providing a limousine are optional extras

Funeral costs

Costs for the same service may vary considerably from one Funeral Director to another and so you may wish to get more than one quote to compare costs. “Disbursements” are fees paid to others, e.g. cremation, minister, doctor’s certificate, newspaper announcements, flowers etc. Ask the Funeral Director for a written quotation detailing all of these fees. Funeral payments are normally recoverable from the deceased’s estate.

Paying for a funeral

If you arrange a funeral, you are responsible for paying the bill, so you need to ensure that there are sufficient funds in place to cover these costs.

If you are finding it difficult to pay for a funeral that you have had to arrange, you may be entitled to receive a Social Fund Funeral Payment from the Department for Work and Pensions, providing you or your partner receive one of the following:

- Income Support/Employment and Support Allowance
- Housing Benefit
- Council Tax Benefit
- Job Seeker’s Allowance (income based)
- Disabled Person’s Tax Credit
- Working Family’s Tax Credit

Please note there may still be a fee, which has to be paid immediately, even if you are entitled to receive a Social Fund Funeral payment.

Repatriation

Sending bodies abroad requires permission from the Coroner at least four days before the body is to be moved. It is best to discuss this with the Registrar when you register the death and they will be able to advise you about the correct process to follow.

Who do you need to inform?

When someone dies there is a tremendous burden placed on those left behind to ensure that various government departments or local authority services are aware. During your appointment with the Registrar you will be offered the opportunity to take up an additional service called 'Tell Us Once', which is provided free of charge.

If you use this service information can be sent to a number of organisations and services simultaneously informing them that your loved one has died (for example, Housing Benefit Office, Council Tax, Library, Blue Badge, Pensions & Benefits, Passport, Driving Licence). This will remove the burden from you to inform all agencies and services individually.

You can choose to give information in a variety of ways:

- All information direct to the Registrar
- Online – you can only do this when you have registered the death. The Registrar will give you a unique reference number which you will need to use the service. The website address is www.gov.uk/tell-us-once

Other services you may need to inform are:

- Insurance company
- Bank and/or building society
- Employer
- Utility companies
- GP, dentist, optician or anyone else providing medical care

Tissue Donation

Tissue donation is not an easy subject for relative/friends to think about at such a difficult time. Most people are aware that hundreds of lives are saved every year by donated organs, e.g. heart and lungs. You may not realise that donated tissue, such as skin, bone, cornea and heart valves can dramatically improve the quality of life for others and even save them.

Tissue donation must take place within 24 hours and so if you would like more information about this then you can contact the following for advice:

Tissue Service: 0800 432 0559

NHS Blood & Transfusion office (NHSBT): 0300 123 0805

Further information may be obtained from the website:

www.nhsbt.nhs.uk/tissuedonation

Coping with Bereavement and Support

Many organisations offer support to people who have suffered a bereavement including counselling, information and advice and practical support. Some of these organisations and their contact details are listed at the end of this booklet.

The death of someone close can be a devastating experience, often causing stronger emotions than most people have ever felt before. Even if your loved one has been ill for some time and death was expected, there is still a sense of shock when the death occurs. Your reactions may be influenced by a number of things, including your previous experiences of bereavement, your beliefs, cultural background, your current circumstances and how you cope with loss.

Every person's experiences of grief is very different but when someone close dies you may initially feel shocked, numb, angry, guilty and scared. These feelings can change to sadness, and loneliness and the thought of how you will cope in the future may seem frightening. Whilst these feelings can be a normal part of grieving, if they persist and make it difficult for you to manage day to day tasks you may wish to seek professional help from your GP or one of the other organisations offering support and advice.

Useful contacts

Age UK

Age UK can offer advice and support

Tele: 0800 169 6565

www.ageuk.org.uk

Citizens Advice

National network of advice centres offering free, confidential, independent advice.

Tele: 03444 111 444 (England)

03444 77 20 20 (Wales)

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement

This is a national organisation, with local branches, developed to support people following the death of a loved one.

Tele: 0808 808 1677

www.cruse.org.uk

Bereavement Advice Centre

A national organisation that offers advice on all aspects of bereavement.

Tele: 0800 634 9494

www.bereavementadvice.org

Department for Work & Pensions

Carries out eligibility checks on surviving relatives to see what benefits they are entitled to. Also takes claims for bereavement benefits and funeral payments.

Tele: 0800 731 0469

0800 731 0453 (Wales)

Human Tissue Authority

Provides information about body donation for medical research.

Tele: 020 7269 1900

www.hta.gov.uk

Lesbian and Gay Bereavement Project

Telephone helpline offering advice and support to people bereaved by the death of a same sex partner. Support is also available to other family members.

Tele: 020 7833 1674

www.londonfriend.org.uk

Natural Death Centre

Provides information on all types of funeral choices, but especially family-organised, environmentally friendly funerals and natural burial grounds.

Tele: 01962 712 690

www.naturaldeath.org.uk

NHS Blood & Transplant Service

Advice about tissue donation

Tissue National Referral Centre

Tele: 0800 432 0559

www.nhsbt.nhs.uk/tissuedonation

Principal Probate Registry

Information and advice on dealing with an estate. Contact details of local probate registries.

www.justice.gov.uk

Roadpeace

Offers practical and emotional support to the bereaved and injured through road traffic accidents.

Tele: 0845 4500 355

www.roadpeace.org

Samaritans

A confidential, emotional support service for anyone experiencing feelings of distress or despair for any reason.

Tele: 116 123

www.samaritans.org



The Hospital would like to thank RNS Publications for publishing this information and the following pages contain some features from local services offering their help at this time.

Whilst the Hospital is grateful of their support it does not endorse or recommend any of the services that they provide.



stopping mail

STOPPING JUNK MAIL

It is distressing to deal with a bereavement and unsolicited mail can be insensitive and destructive during a grieving process.

By scanning the below QR code on your phone or visiting www.stopmail.co.uk, we are able to securely share this information with mailing organisations and under the Data Protection Act the information will not be used for any other purpose.

Other benefits reduce the possibility of identity fraud, such as assumed identity and you will only have to supply the information once.



www.stopmail.co.uk

0808 168 9607 from a landline
0333 006 8114 from a mobile

Remember Someone Special with Memory Space



Memory Space is a place where you can keep photos and share stories about a loved one, while raising money for Mind in their memory.

By fundraising for us with Memory Space in your loved one's honour, you'll help create a kinder society – one where everyone who is struggling can talk openly about their mental health and get the support they need, when they need it. In this way, some good can come from a place of loss.

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Probate Matters

You may need help, support or advice on what to do when someone dies in relation to probate.

Freephone: 0808 168 5181

Mobiles: 0333 240 0360

We offer free guidance and advice on the legal and financial aspects of bereavement including your responsibilities and whether probate is required.

Calls are free from most land lines, some calls may be monitored for training purposes and all calls are confidential.



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