

Death Certification, Inquests and the Coroner

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Death Certification

- S22 Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953

“In the case of the death of any person who has been attended during his last illness by a registered medical practitioner, that practitioner shall sign a certificate in the prescribed form stating to the best of his knowledge and belief the cause of death and shall forthwith deliver that certificate to the registrar.”

The expectation being that the registrar will then report the death to the coroner if:-

- (1) The death appeared to be violent or unnatural;
- (2) The medical practitioner had not treated the patient in the 14 days prior to death;
- (3) The death occurred within 24 hours of admission to hospital;
- (4) Death occurred in state detention;
- (5) The informant expressed concerns in relation to the death.

The list of those deaths that are ultimately reportable to the coroner has developed over the years and may vary from one area to another.

The Notification of Deaths Regulations 2014

Duty to notify a relevant senior coroner of a death.

3(1) A registered medical practitioner[®] must notify a relevant coroner of a death where R comes to know of the death on or after.....and one or more of the circumstances set out in paragraphs (2) to (5) applies.

(2) R knows or has reason to suspect that the death-

(a) occurred as a result of poisoning, the use of a controlled drug, medicinal product or toxic chemical;

(b) occurred as a result of trauma, violence or physical injury, whether inflicted intentionally, or otherwise;

(c) is related to any treatment or procedure of a medical or similar nature;

(d) occurred as a result of self harm, (including a failure by the deceased person to preserve their own life) whether intentional or otherwise;

(e) occurred as a result of an injury or disease received during, or attributable to, the course of the deceased person's work;

(f) occurred as a result of a notifiable accident, poisoning or disease;

(g) occurred as a result of neglect or failure of care by another person; or

(h) was otherwise unnatural.

(3) The death occurred in custody or otherwise in state detention.

(4) (a) No attending practitioner attended the deceased at any time in the period of 28 days prior to the date of death; or

(b) where such a practitioner did attend, no person is available within a reasonable period to prepare a certificate under s20 C&JA 2009.

(5) The identity of the deceased person is unknown.

Notification.

4(1) Where R must notify a relevant coroner of a death under regulation 3, such notification may be oral or in writing but must be made as soon as is reasonably practicable.

(2) The notification must include the following information so far as it is known to R-

- (a) the full name of the deceased person;
- (b) the date of birth of the deceased person;
- (c) the gender of the deceased person;
- (d) the usual place of residence of the deceased person;

(e) the place of death, if different;

(f) the date and time of death;

(g) the occupation of the deceased person;

(h) where the deceased person was under the age of 18 years, the name and address of a parent or person who had parental responsibility or care of the deceased person;

(i) the name of the attending practitioner where this is not R;

(j) the paragraph or paragraphs of regulation 3 which R considers to be relevant:

(k) R's name, address (including e-mail address where available) and telephone number;

(l) Any other information R considers to be relevant.

The Coroner

A senior coroner who is made aware that the body of a deceased person is within the coroner's area must as soon as practicable conduct an investigation into the person's death if the coroner has reason to suspect that –

- (a) The deceased died a violent or unnatural death,
- (b) The cause of death is unknown, or
- (c) The deceased died while in custody or otherwise in state detention.

The inquest

The purpose of an inquest into a person's death is to ascertain—

- (a) Who the deceased was;
- (b) How when and where the deceased came by his or her death;
- (c) The particulars required by the 1953 Act to be registered concerning the death.

Practical Considerations or 5 Top Tips for GPs

1. Statements

May be an overview or related to a specific event. Statements may be admitted as evidence.

- (i) detail your full name, professional qualifications and business address;
- (ii) say whether statement is based on your recollection of the patient, review of notes, or both;
- (iii) provide a chronological summary of your involvement;
- (iv) number paragraphs;
- (v) explain medical terms and abbreviations; and
- (vi) sign and date the statement.

2. Giving evidence

- attend in good time suitably dressed;
- be prepared and have copy of any statement made together with medical records;
- explain all medical terminology

3. Make sure that you are familiar with “Medical Certificate of Cause of Death – notes for doctors”.

4. Be aware of “Guidance for doctors completing Medical Certificates of Cause of Death in England and Wales” issued by ONS in July 2010

5. Be honest and transparent. Remember there is a duty of candour.

Are there any questions?