

Dear colleague

Re: death certification reforms planned from April 2024

We wanted to write to you in advance of the statutory reforms around the Medical Examiner Service which are coming into effect from April 2024 and which all General Practices need to be preparing for.

The Medical Examiner Service rolled out across the NHS in England from 2019 with the aim of improving death certification and putting bereaved families and friends at the centre of the process. It provides an opportunity for the bereaved to ask questions about the cause of death and discuss the care that their friend or relative received.

On 14 December 2023, draft legislation was published which sets out reforms planned from April 2024 (exact date is still to be confirmed). This will include a medical practitioner being eligible to be an attending practitioner and complete a Medical Certificate Cause of Death (MCCD) if they have attended the deceased in their lifetime. The attending practitioner will propose a cause of death, if they can do so, to the best of their knowledge and belief. All deaths will be independently reviewed either by a medical examiner or a coroner.

Below we have summarised the key points to the legislation and produced a briefing pack which adds a bit more detail. There are also links to further information on the draft legislation.

It is acknowledged that whilst the process for implementation is being shaped at a Greater Manchester level, implementation will take place at a local level therefore local adaptation may need to be considered. This includes consideration for existing systems, including IT and clinical software operability. Pilots are underway in the majority of localities to determine how the pathway will be implemented.

It is recommended that all healthcare providers set up processes with immediate effect to start referring deaths if they have not already done so. This will avoid disruption and distress when the regulations come into force, allow procedures to bed in, and enable issues to be identified and addressed.

If you are not already engaging with the pilot in your locality, please contact the lead Medical Examiner in your area in the first instance (contact details below).

Key points

- A new Medical Certificate of Cause of Death, which can be completed by a doctor who attended the deceased at **any time**, will be launched.
- Attending practitioners will have a legal duty to provide information and the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death to the ME for scrutiny.
- Attending practitioners **must share** the MCCD and proposed cause of death with a medical examiner, who will scrutinise these **before** submission to the registrar
- Healthcare providers can already share records of deceased patients with medical examiners and will be mandated to do so when the regulations come into force

- Deaths cannot be registered until the registrar receives notification of the cause of death from the medical examiner or the coroner
- The Medical examiner's scrutiny will make the form Cremation 4 confirmation obsolete

Contact details for Medical Examiners

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Further information

- **Overview of Reforms (Plain Language)**
[Overview of death certification reforms and statutory medical examiner system](#)
- **New Draft Regulations in full:**
[Medical examiners in England: draft regulations - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
[Medical certificate of cause of death: draft regulations - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
[Additional functions of the national medical examiner: draft regulations - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- **There is also a written ministerial statement:**
<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2023-12-14/hcws131>
- [Listen to this podcast about how medical examiners can support GPs](#)
- [Listen to a podcast by the National Medical Examiner](#)

We will be keeping in touch with future updates on how the reforms are progressing but wanted to make sure as many of you as possible as preparing for the changes now ahead of implementation in April 2024. We will also be producing an FAQs in due course so if you have any questions, please do let us know via gmhscp.gm-stakeholders@nhs.net.

Yours sincerely,

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