

Role of the GP

Sudden Death Attendance Policy Change

On 4th June 2018, Thames Valley Police, Thames Valley Coroners' and South Central Ambulance Service changed their procedures for dealing with sudden deaths.

How is the new procedure different from the previous?

Thames Valley Police are no longer attending all sudden deaths.

Previously, it would have been the case that paramedics would have called on police officers to attend the death, who in turn reported the death to the coroner. A coroner's officer would have contacted the GP to discuss the patient, establishing their medical history, date of consultations, ask if the death was expected or not and if the treating doctor could issue the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) or whether a post mortem examination was required. At this time, the deceased would have been lying in the named hospital mortuary.

The procedure is now:

1. Police officers must attend all unexpected deaths that fall into the following categories.

- 'Suspicious Deaths' and where criminality may be a factor.
- All reported violent and unnatural deaths due to accident or trauma.
- Deaths with police contact.
- Death in a prison or other custodial / state detention establishment.
- Fatal accidents of all types (e.g. Road Traffic Incidents, works accidents, factory accidents etc.).
- Suicide.
- Death due to suspected drug abuse.
- All deaths where alcohol is a contributory factor (e.g. where a person sustained a head injury whilst intoxicated).
- Sudden death where the age of the deceased is under 30 years of age.
- A death resulting from a previous accident / trauma.
- Persons found dead after forced entry into premises. Even if the death appears to be from natural causes.
- Person died in a public place.
- Any death in hospital where the staff caring for the welfare of the deceased are accused of criminal neglect or malpractice.
- Deaths in private premises where the next of kin, family member, or other responsible adult will not take responsibility for the deceased (likely to occur where the ambulance service

have attended but the person on scene is not willing to remain and police presence is required to ensure arrangements are made for the body to be removed).

- Where a decomposed body is found.
 - Deaths where the person is not registered with a GP.
 - Death where the person is from outside the Thames Valley Police area and not registered with a local GP.
2. In addition, police may attend deaths where it is obvious to a non-medically trained person that life is extinct. In these circumstances police will verify the death (see paragraph 4 below).
 3. If paramedics have attended to confirm the death and after liaising with the police control room, concluded that police are not required to attend, then:
 - I. Paramedics will advise the family that they can contact their own chosen funeral director and the deceased will be transported to their premise (as opposed to the named hospital as per the previous arrangement).
 - II. Paramedics will advise the deceased's GP of the death and provide some background information as to the circumstances leading to the death, time and date of death. Attached is an example of the information that the GP surgery will receive.
 - III. The family are advised to contact the GP either the same day or next working day.
 4. If there are no life-saving opportunities and the paramedics do not attend the scene/death, then:
 - I. Police officers will attend the death to verify death and complete pages 1 and 4 of the police form called Gen 19 and send this to the Coroner's Office marking the email as 'Notification of Death'.
 - II. Police are sending this form to the Coroner's Office as they do not have access to GP contact details.
 - III. On receipt of this form, the coroner's officer will send this together with a short note to say this is merely a notification of the death to the deceased's GP surgery and that the Coroner's Office is **not** dealing with the death.
 - IV. Upon receipt of this notification, the GP can either issue the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) or refer the death to the coroner (see below).
 5. If the out of hours doctor attends to confirm death, GPs will receive the notification from them in the normal manner. OOH doctors are advised that unless the death falls within one of the categories for police to attend, the deceased may be transported to the family's chosen funeral director.

How are GPs notified that a Patient has died?

You may be notified of a death of a patient by South Central Ambulance Service, Out of Hours Service, family, or as in 3(iii) by the Coroner's Office

- Paramedics/coroner's officers are using the generic surgery email address to notify GP's of the death. Paramedics have a list of GP practices' nhs.net email addresses linked to the NHS E GP contact list/register. **The ambulance service has stressed to Commissioners that they should ensure that the GP's details are updated on the national NHS E register.**
- The email addresses should be checked regularly by the surgery and administration staff should highlight the death to a doctor as a matter of urgency.
- Please remember, the deceased's representative has a statutory duty to register a death within 5 days, the timing starts when the death occurs and not when a GP starts dealing. It is important to avoid delays, particularly, if the death has to be referred to the Coroner and a post mortem examination is required.

What action should I take when I am notified of a death?

Medical cause of death is known and there is no reason to report this to the coroner

If there is no reason to notify the Coroner of the death, you may issue the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) and give this to the family.

The death needs to be referred to the coroner

If the death is reportable to the coroner or you are unsure as to the medical cause of death, you should complete the e-referral form that can be accessed on the Local Medical Council website for Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire (www.bbolmc.co.uk)

Please ensure that the referral is completed at the earliest opportunity.

All boxes on the referral form need to be completed in full.

Action taken by Coroner's Office

Once the referral form has been received by the Coroner's Office, on behalf of the Coroner, enquiries will be made to ascertain if the coroner can support the Medical Cause of Death (MCCD) (if one has been offered) or if the coroner authorises a post mortem examination.

If the coroner supports the GP issuing the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD)

The coroner's officer will advise you that the coroner is content to support the MCCD. The wording when you issue the MCCD must be the same as that agreed with the coroner. You should annotate the MCCD to this effect. For your information, the coroner will issue a 'Part A' form to the Registration Service. The registrars will check this against the MCCD when the family are attending their appointment to register the death.

If the coroner authorises a post mortem examination

The coroner's officer will advise you that the coroner requires a post mortem examination to be carried out. If this is the case, you do not need to take any further action. You do not issue the MCCD.

The coroner's officer will ensure that they have all the relevant information from you – circumstances, medical history, medication, when the deceased was last treated and by whom, next of kin/deceased's representative details and where the deceased is lying (which funeral director premise) etc.

The coroner's officer will contact the next of kin/deceased's representative to advise the need for a post mortem examination and the coroner's procedure from thereon.

The coroner's officer will contact the funeral director where the deceased is lying to advise the need of a post mortem examination and to make arrangements to have the deceased transported to the named hospital where the examination will be performed.

Any questions?

If you have any questions regarding a death of a patient or regarding the change in procedure, please contact your local Coroner's Office. This change in policy is being reviewed and so all feedback is welcome.