



**The Leeds
Teaching Hospitals**
NHS Trust

The Medical Examiner Service

Information for relatives

Following the death of a relative you will be asked to contact the bereavement team who will explain what happens next. You may be advised that the death will be referred to a Medical Examiner.

This leaflet will explain the reason you may be contacted by their office, what will be discussed, and why this system has been introduced.

If you would like to receive this publication in other formats (large print, Braille or audio) or languages, please visit:



<https://www.leedsth.nhs.uk/patients-visitors/patient-and-visitor-information/patient-information-leaflets/the-medical-examiner-service>

or contact



leedsth-tr.meoffice@nhs.net



Address



Telephone



Website



Email

Who are Medical Examiners and Medical Examiner Officers?

Since 2019, some senior NHS doctors have chosen to receive specialist training and to spend some of their time working as Medical Examiners. Alongside other specially trained staff, their job is to give independent advice about causes of death (except for deaths which have to be reviewed by a Coroner).

Medical Examiners and their staff (usually called Medical Examiner Officers) offer families and carers of the person who has died an opportunity to raise questions or concerns about the causes of death, or about the care the person received before their death. This will usually be through a telephone call, or sometimes a meeting. They can explain what medical language means, and make it easier to understand.

Medical Examiners also look at the relevant medical records, and discuss the causes of death with the doctor filling in the official form (its official name is the *Medical Certificate of Cause of Death*).

You can be confident Medical Examiners and their staff will provide an independent view, as they will only review cases where they, or their staff, **have not** provided care for the patient.

Coroners

When the Coroner starts an investigation into a death, the Coroner (not the Medical Examiner) investigates the death independently, though the Medical Examiner may still provide expert medical advice to the Coroner.

Some deaths must be notified to the Coroner - you can read about this on the internet (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/notification-of-deaths-regulations-2019-guidance>).

You can also get the guidance in other formats by emailing the Ministry of Justice at: coroners@justice.gov.uk (this is the part of the government responsible for the guidance).

Why am I being asked if I have any concerns?

A discussion with a Medical Examiner or their staff provides you with an opportunity to have an open and honest conversation with someone who was not involved in providing care to the person who died, and anything about the care that may be worrying or of concern. It could be as simple as helping you to understand more about the treatment and causes of death or to understand the medical language used, or there may be something about the care which did not feel right or ideal. This is an opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns.

The Medical Examiner will provide an independent view of causes of death and the care provided. Medical Examiners and their staff will discuss your thoughts, questions and concerns, and if they find issues with care that need further investigation, Medical Examiners will refer these to someone who can do this. As well as answering your questions, this can help the NHS provide better care for other patients and carers in the future, for example by uncovering ways in which patient and family care could be improved.

Can I ask the Medical Examiner to talk to someone else if it's too difficult for me to speak with them?

Yes of course, the Medical Examiner or their staff may contact you to ask who you would like us to talk to instead, or you can let the bereavement team know if you would rather have someone else as a first point of contact. The Medical Examiner or Medical Examiner Officer will usually contact you by phone before you collect the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death, but we can arrange other ways of contacting you if you let us know what is best.

What questions will I be asked?

The Medical Examiner or their staff are able to explain what is written on the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death and why, if requested. They will also discuss the Medical Examiner's review and ask if there are any concerns or questions about the care the person received before their death. This is the best time for you to ask any questions you have about the death and to speak about anything that concerns you.

What if I don't want to speak to the Medical Examiner or their staff, or I don't want to tell them about my concerns?

We understand this is likely to be a difficult time for many people, speaking to someone is completely your choice. If you are not sure, you can contact the Medical Examiner or their staff (contact details are on the last page of this leaflet) and ask for more information before deciding if you want to go ahead. They are trained professionals who are there to guide and help you during this difficult time and will be very understanding.

What will happen if something was not right?

The Medical Examiner and their staff are here to listen to your questions and concerns and provide answers if possible. If issues are found, they will be passed onto the appropriate people to be formally investigated; if this is the case the Medical Examiner or Officer can explain this process to you. Medical Examiners will not investigate further themselves, as to not delay the death certification process.

Will funeral plans or release of the body take longer?

Medical Examiners make every effort to avoid any delays and work with families and carers of the person who died to meet the legal requirements for registering deaths. Each case will be dealt with individually and, when possible, the Medical Examiner's office will give priority to those where relatives need urgent release of the deceased.

What can I do if I have questions or concerns about the Medical Examiner process?

If you are not satisfied with the Medical Examiner's advice, we suggest you discuss this with staff from the Medical Examiner's office at first.

If you are still not satisfied, you can also contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) where staff will be happy to listen to your concerns and ask the appropriate member of Trust staff to contact you to talk through and resolve your concerns as quickly as possible.

The PALS team will ask that someone contacts you within two working days of receiving your feedback.

PALS can be contacted in the following ways:

 0113 206 6261

 patientexperience.leadsth@nhs.net

How can I contact the Medical Examiner office?

You can contact the Medical Examiner office here:

 **Leedsth-tr.meoffice@nhs.net**

 **Medical Examiner Office - Gledhow Wing,
Level 4, St James's University Hospital, Beckett Street,
Leeds, LS9 7TF**

Our office is open between 8:00am and 4:00pm Monday to Friday.

Further information about the Medical Examiner system can be found on the internet (<https://www.england.nhs.uk/establishing-medical-examiner-system-nhs/>).

You can also ask the bereavement service to contact the Medical Examiner office for you.

 **Leedsth-tr.bereavementteam@nhs.net**

St James's University Hospital Bereavement Office

 **0113 206 4162**

Leeds General Infirmary Bereavement Office

 **0113 392 3560**

The bereavement office phone lines are open between 8:30am and 4:30pm Monday to Friday with an answerphone outside these times.

Other Useful Contacts

Chaplaincy is available to offer spiritual and pastoral as well as religious support, to all relatives at any time after bereavement.

St James's University and Wharfedale Hospitals

 0113 206 5935

Leeds General Infirmary and Chapel Allerton Hospitals

 0113 392 2914

Leeds Bereavement Forum is a local charity that directs individuals to support, both locally and nationally, offering help to bereaved people from all backgrounds.

 www.lbforum.org.uk

 info@lbforum.org.uk

 0113 225 3975

Cruse Bereavement Care has specialist bereavement experts who have experience in all types of loss and can offer support however and whenever a death occurred.

 www.cruse.org.uk

 0808 808 1677

 helpline@cruse.org.uk

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