

My name is David Green. I'm a Procurator Fiscal. I'm the Head of the Scottish Fatalities Investigation Unit of the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. Procurators Fiscal investigate all sudden, unexpected, unexplained or suspicious deaths, and a significant number of deaths obviously fall into that kind of category.

There are about 55,000 deaths in Scotland every year, and we get 11,500 of them reported to us, so roughly 20%. My role here is to try to reach out and explain to the medical profession not to report deaths to me which are natural and unavoidable, and to try to explain to them that's what they should be doing and to empower them in so doing, to explain to them how they go about getting advice in order that they can do that. And that is all about trying to minimise the distress and upset caused to nearest relatives.

It seems to me, that many doctors have lost sight of the amount of time it takes to obtain a post-mortem, obtain results of a post-mortem. Any death that is post-mortem creates a huge delay before the family are allowed to go ahead and make burial arrangements. We're probably talking a minimum of seven days and potentially significantly longer than that, and that's not appropriate if the death is natural and unavoidable.

Do you work closely with the Death Certification Review Service?

My team, who are all specialists, the Fatalities Investigation Unit, do nothing but that. They're not involved in prosecution, are in pretty much daily contact with George and his colleagues. We will discuss individual cases, we have regular meetings about the strategy that we're putting in place.

We have a project called Deaths in the Community that we're working on to try to reduce the numbers of deaths that shouldn't come to the Fiscal. So, there's a very close working relationship between the two organisations. George will frequently refer cases to us that he thinks we should have been told about but were not, and we in turn will very frequently refer doctors to George's service, where we think that they should be giving a Certificate but they're reluctant to do so. And we do that because if they then speak to a doctor at DCRS, they get a peer-to-peer conversation that often allows them that reassurance that it's proper and appropriate to provide a Certificate.

What was your main reason for wanting to be involved with the conference?

I would say that over the last three years or so, we've managed to reduce the numbers of inappropriate deaths reported to the Fiscal by about 1,200 deaths per annum. So that's a significant number. I still believe that there are quite a significant number in there that should not be referred to us, and it's that group that I'm hoping to try to reduce by being involved in initiatives like this. I think there are probably somewhere in the region of 1,500 to 2,000 deaths which could be given a Medical Certificate, without being referred to the Procurator Fiscal. And a reference to the Fiscal comes with all sorts of distress for nearest relatives, because we will send out the police to investigate. We ourselves are involved in that investigation. It becomes a judicial and police-led process, which is invariably distressing. It should only happen when it's necessary.

The film was produced in March 2020 and can be found at www.sad.scot.nhs.uk or <https://vimeo.com/393646800>

For more information visit www.sad.scot.nhs.uk or contact supportarounddeath@nes.scot.nhs.uk

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