

Death Certification:

Frequently asked Questions for Non-Medical Staff



This is a short guide for non-medical staff who might interact with people who are bereaved, around the time of receiving the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death.

Please note this leaflet is not designed to be given to patients or families.



TERMINOLOGY

When a person dies the first thing that happens is confirmation, then certification and finally registration of death.

Confirmation (previously verification) of death is when a suitably qualified healthcare professional confirms that the person has died.



Certification of death is when a doctor writes a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD). This includes the details of the deceased with the time, date, place and cause(s) of the death. It is a legal document that provides evidence that a person has died and states the cause(s) of death.



Registration of death is when the information on the MCCD, along with other information is entered on the national register of deaths.

The Death Certification Review Service (DCRS) carries out reviews of MCCDs. The DCRS is a team of medical reviewers who are all experienced and trained doctors.

THE MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF CAUSE OF DEATH (MCCD)



Who can complete the MCCD?

A doctor should complete the MCCD to the best of their knowledge and belief.

What status has the MCCD as a legal document?

The MCCD provides a permanent legal record of a death which allows the family to register the death. It cannot be used as evidence for banks or to settle an estate.

Who receives it (what if there are no family members)?

The named next of kin or person(s) acting on behalf of the deceased should receive the MCCD. Where there are no such people, then the bereavement coordinator/lead within your Health Board may be able to provide further information or contact the National Ultimus Haeres Unit direct (0300 020 4196 or 0141 420 8804) who will discuss the process with you.

Who should discuss the content of the MCCD with the person who is bereaved?

It is important that the content of the MCCD is discussed and this should preferably be done by a doctor. If the family are asked to collect the MCCD at a certain date and time, then the doctor issuing the MCCD should be available to meet with them to answer any questions.

When can the Funeral Director move the body?

In the community the funeral director should be contacted once death has been confirmed. In hospital, where possible, wait until the MCCD is complete and ready for collection. The body should not be moved from the place of death if there is police or procurator fiscal involvement without their permission.



THE MCCD REVIEW PROCESS

Why are MCCDs reviewed?

The DCRS reviews a random sample of MCCDs, to check their quality and accuracy, and improve the way that information about deaths is recorded in Scotland.

What happens if the MCCD is selected for review?

There are two main types of review. For Level 1 reviews the medical reviewer will check the MCCD and speak to the certifying doctor. This should take one working day. There are also a smaller number of Level 2 reviews where the medical reviewer will check relevant medical records before speaking to the doctor. This can take up to three working days.

Are all MCCDs reviewed?

About one in eight MCCDs are randomly selected for review by the DCRS. This means that around 6,000 MCCDs are reviewed out of the approximately 55,000 MCCDs (deaths) that occur in Scotland each year.

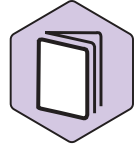
If not selected, can individuals request a review of a particular MCCD?

If someone has questions about the content of the MCCD then the certifying doctor should be contacted. An interested person review assesses the accuracy of the information on the certificate and not the quality of care provided to the person who has died.

What if the Procurator Fiscal is involved?

Deaths that are reported to the procurator fiscal are not reviewed by the DCRS.

THE DEATH REGISTRATION PROCESS



What is it?

A death must be registered within eight days in any office of the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages in Scotland. Most operate an appointment system.

Do all deaths in Scotland have to be registered?

All deaths that happen in Scotland must be registered regardless of the cause, or manner, of death, even if the deceased did not live in Scotland.

There are different processes that parents will need to follow after a neonatal death or stillbirth. Seek specialist advice in these cases.

Who can register a death?

A close relative or partner should normally register the death. An executor, or someone who was present at the death, or the occupier of the property where the person died can also do this. In the absence of any relative or nominated person, staff should follow local arrangements.

What information will be needed?

A death cannot be registered without the MCCD. It is helpful (but not essential) if those registering a death also take:

- the deceased person's birth and marriage, or civil partnership certificates,
- the deceased person's NHS medical card,
- any documents about a state pension or any social security benefits the deceased received.

What documents will the Registrar provide?

Following registration of a death, the Registrar will provide:

- a Certificate of Registration of Death (form 14) – which should be given to the Funeral Director,
- a green social security registration or Notification of Death Certificate (form 334/S1) – which is needed if the person who died received a state pension or any social security benefits,
- a shortened version of the Death Certificate (copies of the full Death Certificate can be purchased as some organisations may ask for this).



FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS

When can funeral arrangements be started?

Funeral arrangements can be made whilst the review is happening, but the funeral cannot take place until the review is finished and the Certificate of Registration of Death (Form 14) has been issued.

What happens if a burial or cremation must take place within a short timescale following death?

An application for 'advance registration' will be considered in special circumstances, such as:

- religious/cultural (such as faith requirements to bury a person's body quickly),
- compassionate (where delays would cause significant and unnecessary distress),
- practical/administrative (for example, family have travelled from abroad to attend the funeral).

The Registrar can help with application at the time of registering the death.

What if the death was abroad but the funeral will be in Scotland?

Deaths outside of the UK must be registered according to the regulations of the country where the death occurred. Approval to bury or cremate someone in Scotland who has died abroad must be given by DCRS.

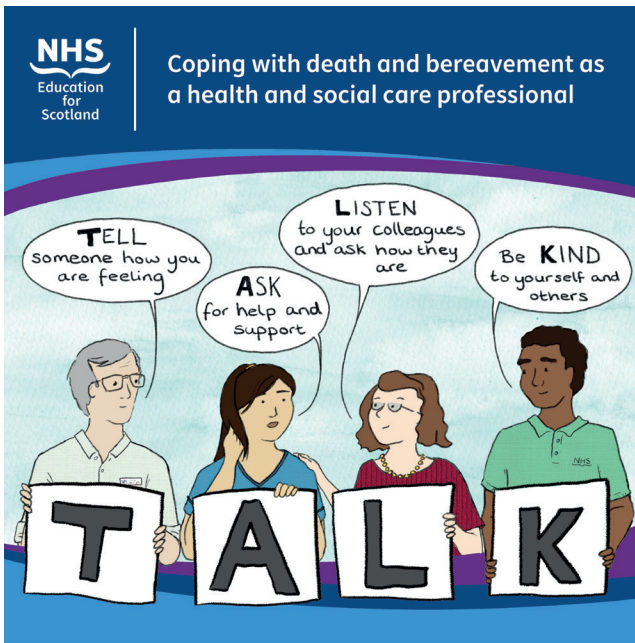
STAFF SUPPORT



How can I access support if I feel I am struggling?

Being part of a team who is caring for people who are dying or those who are bereaved may be upsetting and stressful for staff.

It is important that managers allow appropriate training and support for their staff and that teams help each other. Allowing time for reflective practice can be valuable.



Staff may find coping with situations related to death and dying at work particularly challenging if they have recently been personally bereaved. A flexible and sensitive approach should be adopted.

Information regarding where support is available should be made known to staff e.g.

- occupational health,
- staff counselling services,
- spiritual care teams.

Further information can be found at:

Healthcare Improvement Scotland Death Certification Review Service webpages:
http://www.healthcareimprovementscotland.org/our_work/governance_and_assurance/death_certification.aspx

NHS Education for Scotland Support around Death website
www.sad.scot.nhs.uk

National Ultimeus Haeres Unit
<https://www.qltr.gov.uk/content/overview>



NHS Education for Scotland
Westport 102
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www.nes.scot.nhs.uk

This resource may be made available, in full or summary form, in alternative formats and community languages. Please contact us on 0131 656 3200 or email altformats@nes.scot.nhs.uk to discuss how we can best meet your requirements.

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