

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 completion of 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.

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. Registrars cannot amend information contained within the MCCD without agreement from the certifying doctor, so it is important that causes of death are written appropriately.

Who should discuss the content of the MCCD with the family?

It is important that the content of the MCCD is discussed with the family and this should preferably be done by a doctor. When the doctor issuing the MCCD meets the family to discuss the MCCD and answer any questions they have, they should ask the family where they intend to register the death so that the doctor can send the MCCD to the right registrar. The doctor should also advise that the MCCD may be randomly selected for review by DCRS.

Who receives the MCCD?

The MCCD should be scanned and emailed, then posted by the medical team (or administrative support), to the registration office where the family has advised that death will be registered. Contact details for registration offices can be found on the National Records of Scotland (NRS) [website](#). The next of kin may be copied in when the MCCD is emailed to the registrar, if they wish, but the paper MCCD should not be given to the next of kin to pass to the registrar. If there is no named next of kin or person(s) acting on behalf of the deceased, 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.

When can the Funeral Director move the body?

In the community, the funeral director should be contacted once death has been confirmed. In both community and hospital, where possible, wait until the MCCD is complete and ready for sending to the registrar. 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 62,500 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 in the first instance. If they remain concerned, they can request an interested person review via [this link](#). 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

When should a death be registered?

A death must be registered within eight days, in any office of the registrar of births, deaths and marriages in Scotland. Most offices 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.

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.

How is a death registered?

When the person registering the death contacts the registration office, they may be offered an in-person appointment to attend the office to register the death, or they may be given the option to register the death by telephone or during an online call (a 'remote registration').

What information will be needed?

A death cannot be registered without the MCCD, which should have been sent to the registration office by the doctor. It is helpful (but not essential) if those registering a death have available:

- + the deceased person's birth and marriage, or civil partnership certificates
- + the deceased person's NHS medical card



The Death Registration Process

The registrar will ask for the deceased person's:

- + full name
- + date of birth
- + usual residence
- + occupation (or former occupation)
- + details of marriage(s) or civil partnership(s)
- + full name and occupation of the deceased's father/parent
- + full name, maiden surname and occupation of the deceased's mother
- + full name and address of the deceased's doctor

What documents will the registrar provide?

Following registration of a death, the registrar will provide:

- + a Certificate of Registration of Death (Form 14) to enable funeral arrangements to be completed, this may be emailed by the registrar directly to the funeral director immediately after the registration has taken place
- + a shortened version of the Death Certificate (copies of the full Death Certificate can also be purchased as some organisations may ask for this)

The registrar will provide the person registering the death with information about the [tell us once service](#) which may be used to notify various government departments of the death.

If required, information can also be given about making a claim for bereavement benefits.



Funeral Arrangements

When can funeral arrangements be started?

Funeral arrangements can be made whilst a review of the MCCD 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 by the registrar.

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



Useful resources

NHS Education for Scotland TALK film

<https://vimeo.com/440679133>

Support Around Death website

<https://www.sad.scot.nhs.uk/wellbeing/>

Further information can be found at:

Healthcare Improvement Scotland Death Certification Review Service webpages

https://archive.healthcareimprovementscotland.scot/www.healthcareimprovementscotland.org/our_work/governance_and_assurance/death_certification

NHS Education for Scotland Support around Death website

<https://www.sad.scot.nhs.uk/atafter-death/>

National Ultimus Haeres Unit

[www.qltr.gov.uk/content/overview](http://www qltr.gov.uk/content/overview)

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.



NHS Education for Scotland
Westport 102
West Port
Edinburgh EH3 9DN
Tel: 0131 656 3200
www.nes.scot.nhs.uk

Published June 2024

© NHS Education for Scotland 2024. You can copy or reproduce the information in this document for use within NHSScotland and for non-commercial educational purposes. Use of this document for commercial purposes is permitted only with the written permission of NES.

NESD1890 | Designed and typeset by the NES Design Service.