

NHS Education for Scotland

**Transcript of Understanding the Processes Following a Sudden or Unexplained Death
Video Script**

Narrator The management of a sudden or unexplained death can be challenging for professionals. The responses required may be complex, and come at an extremely difficult time for those who are bereaved. This may be further compounded by the conflicting interests of all the agencies involved. Empathetic handling and knowledge of the multi agency processes which will occur can reduce unnecessary stress for all concerned.

Laura My name's Laura. My brother Sam died unexpectedly on his way home from university. The news came as terrible shock to us. The person we spoke to most in the first few weeks was Osman, the Police Family Liaison Officer. His job was to provide a link between my family and the investigation team. He tried to answer all our questions, but couldn't tell us everything about Sam's injuries, in case this jeopardised ongoing investigations. He asked us for a recent photograph for the newspapers. Without that they might have taken one from Sam's social media account. It was Osman who told us that the circumstances of Sam's death were suspicious and that the Procurator Fiscal had ordered a post mortem.

Narrator Most sudden or unexplained deaths are reported to the Scottish Fatalities Investigation Unit, within the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. The Procurator Fiscal is there to direct recovery of evidence and instruct the police in carrying out further investigation. If a post mortem examination is instructed, the rationale and process will be explained to the family. They are not required to provide authorisation but their views will be considered. Some families request copies of the Procurator Fiscal's investigation documents. These will be provided unless disclosure could prejudice criminal proceedings.

Laura Later that day, Osman took my parents to identify Sam. This had to be done by two people who knew him, and before the post mortem. Osman had already been to see him so he prepared my parents by explaining what he would look like. Mum wasn't allowed to touch him. For a while she didn't believe it was him... or even that he was dead. She felt so guilty that she hadn't been with him when he died. When they got home Dad telephoned our GP, Dr McDonald to ask for a home visit.

Narrator Before meeting the family be as prepared as possible. Know about the process of reporting deaths to the Procurator Fiscal and when a Fatal

Accident Inquiry may be instructed. Try to ensure you have enough time and minimise the potential for interruptions.

Laura Dr McDonald said he was so sorry to hear that Sam had died. He asked Mum if there was someone who could phone and tell the rest of the family and Sam's friends. Dad wanted to know if he could start arranging Sam's funeral. Dr McDonald explained that after the post mortem, the medical certificate of cause of death is usually available by the next working day, but that the Procurator Fiscal may not release Sam's body for some time. He asked my parents to call the surgery when they got the post mortem results and then gave them leaflets and phone numbers to help them with the next steps. He arranged to come back and visit us the following week.

Narrator Dealing with a traumatic death can be difficult for professionals too. It is important to look after yourself and to access advice and support.

Laura Dr McDonald has kept in touch with all of us. Mum and Dad have been attending one of the groups that he suggested. Sam's university held a service. It was beautiful; we've found support from our community. But our life will never be the same again. For us, it's about finding a new normality to life without Sam.

Narrator As a healthcare professional, you can best help families by being well informed. Don't be afraid to ask for help, and work together with your colleagues to minimise any further distress to all involved. Families tell us that what you say and how you say it will be remembered forever.

The film was produced in March 2016 and can be found at www.sad.scot.nhs.uk or <https://vimeo.com/167887527>

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