



NHS Education for Scotland

Transcript of 'Death Certification, the review process and discussions with families' video - Dr George Fernie and Dr. Katherine Ritchie

Katie:

Hello, my name is Katie Ritchie, Scottish Clinical Leadership Fellow for NHS Education for Scotland in Scottish Government this year, my background is Emergency Medicine Registrar.

George:

Really good to meet you Katie, I am George Fernie, the Senior Medical Reviewer for Scotland and I run the Death Certification Review Service at Healthcare Improvement Scotland.

Katie:

Lovely to meet you too today George and thank you very much for meeting with me today I was hoping to we could discuss MCCD so that's the Medical Certificate and Cause of Death today

George:

Yes it is and it is something we review on a random proportionate basis so we the plan is that we provide better quality of information in relation to the content of the Certificates and whilst that is primarily for public health reasons and to improve clinical governance we also really want to make sure that the relatives understand in plain English what has happened to their loved ones.

Katie:

Ok that's great thank you particularly what I would like to discuss is how we can prevent harm and distress to the families of the deceased, the thing that really has struck with me is the fact I was involved in a case where the MCCD was left in a brown envelope with reception staff the for the relatives of the deceased's patient to collect unfortunately when they collected the envelope took it home and opened it the information didn't make sense to them it didn't collaret with what they had thought had been the cause of their relatives death so they came back up to the hospital to speak to us and it was distressing for them as well to be back in the place where their relative had died and I just wondered what your advice would be around scenarios like this

George:

Yes I mean it is an important legal document and obviously something that the family need to have to be able to register the Death and go ahead with funeral arrangements unfortunately they don't always make sense and one of the main functions of the service is to improve the quality of the certificates to avoid the number that are not in order and we have been quite successful at that since we started the service when it was 44% it is down to about 22% so that I think has made a tremendous difference the other thing we emphasise is to make sure is they are written in plain English and there is a logical sequence there as well as the content being accurate

Katie:

That makes a lot of sense I think it would really reduce the anxiety in this case for them to have seen that in plain English another thing that really struck me when I put it in the notes it hadn't been myself who completed the Certificate when I looked through the notes it seemed there had been a degree of uncertainty of what had been the cause of death a referral to the Procurator Fiscal wasn't relevant in this case however I have heard there is an advice line available is that correct

George:

We do have and we review around 6,000 non Procurator Fiscal cases a year of the 57,000 deaths that occur in Scotland but our enquiries line now handles over 2,500 cases and those are from Drs either in secondary care perhaps with a degree of complexity or in General Practice where there has been a death in the Community so that they can get support in order that they can issue a Certificate to the best of their knowledge and belief, it doesn't have to be absolute certainty but to avoid the necessity perhaps for an autopsy but based on the information they have in the records

Katie:

That is really helpful to know, and I think it will be particularly helpful for myself and colleagues in the Emergency Department where we don't always have all the available information to hand so that is helpful to know about so thank you

George:

We are extremely happy to help colleagues with and hopefully the reassurance we provide allows them professionally to be able to issue certificates in circumstances that otherwise might not be possible

Katie:

That's a fantastic support to have thank you very much and I completely agree with your point about having the discussion with the family at the time of completing the Certificate if possible, to avoid any problems

George:

No and as a common courtesy it's the least we can do so it just is a very positive experience for many people both for those who have lost someone close to them but also for the clinicians who have written out the Certificate

Katie:

Very true thank you very much for meeting with me today George it has been helpful

George:

Lovely to meet you likewise and I think the service we provide particularly with the enquiries line we have it is a very useful function for our colleagues to have as a resource,

The film was produced in March 2020 and can be found at www.sad.scot.nhs.uk or <https://vimeo.com/395688758>

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

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