Introducing the Medical Examiner Service

Information for relatives and friends

This leaflet can be made available in other formats including large print, CD and Braille and in languages other than English, upon request.
Please accept our deepest condolences following the death of your relative or friend.

The Medical Examiner service was rolled out across the NHS in England from 2019 with the aim of improving death certification and ensuring that bereaved families and friends are kept at the centre of the process.

By introducing this new service, the NHS aims to provide an opportunity for the bereaved to ask questions about the cause of death and discuss the care that their friend or relative received.

**Who are Medical Examiners (ME) and Medical Examiner Officers (MEO)?**

Medical Examiners are senior NHS Doctors who have not been involved in the care of the person who died. Medical Examiner Officers are the clinical support for the MEs. They have all had specialist training to undertake the roles and help families during these difficult times, knowing the bereaved will need support.

**What does the ME do?**

MEs and MEOs review the relevant medical records and discuss the care with the medical team who were looking after the person who died. This is to ensure that when completing the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD), the document accurately reflects the details of the cause of death.

Medical Examiners or their team (MEOs) will discuss the cause of death with the bereaved family or close friends. This gives you the opportunity to ask questions, give any feedback or raise concerns, if you have any, in relation to your loved one’s death.

You will receive a telephone call a few days after the death. The ME can make it easier for you to understand some of the medical language in the MCCD or the patient’s records.
In some situations, the death is discussed with the Coroner’s Office. By law, some deaths must be reported and then investigated by the Coroner. The ME office are guided by the Coroner’s decisions, but that may mean they cannot issue the MCCD. The ME Office will be able to support you if Coroner involvement is required.

Further information is provided in the following link: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/notification-of-deaths-regulations-2019-guidance

**What is the Coroner’s Service?**

The Coroner’s service investigate deaths where, for whatever reason, a Doctor cannot issue a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death. This is an investigation independent from the Medical Examiner, although they may still provide expert medical advice to the Coroner.

Some deaths must be reported to the Coroner. You can read more information on the Teesside Coroner’s website: https://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk/births-deaths-and-marriages/coroners-service-teesside

You can also receive guidance in other formats by emailing the Ministry of Justice at coroners@justice.gov.uk (this is the part of the government responsible for the guidance of causes of death).

**Why am I being asked to speak to the Medical Examiner?**

A discussion with the Medical Examiner or their team will provide you with an opportunity to have an open and honest conversation with someone who was not involved in providing care to your loved one who has died.
It could be as simple as helping you to understand more about the treatment and causes of death or to understand the medical language used. There may be some aspect about their care which you would like to discuss, and this is your opportunity to have a conversation about your thoughts and feelings.

If the Medical Examiners find any issues with care that need further inquiry, they will refer these cases to someone within the Trust who can arrange this.

As well as answering your questions, this can help the NHS provide better care for other patients and carers in the future. It may provide ways in which patient and family care could be improved.

**Can I ask the Medical Examiner to talk to someone else if it is too difficult for me to speak with them?**

Yes, this can be discussed when the ME’s team contact you, or you can let the Bereavement Team know if you would rather they spoke to someone else on your behalf.

If you change your mind and feel able to talk to the team about the death of your relative or friend, you can let the team know at any point.

**What happens if I do not want to speak to the Medical Examiner or their team?**

We understand this is likely to be a difficult time for you. Speaking to someone is completely your choice. If you are not sure, you can contact the Medical Examiner or a member of their team on 01642 383088 or 01642 383912 and ask for more information before deciding if you want to go ahead.

The Medical Examiner Office is open for calls between 9:00am and 4:00pm Monday – Friday.
Will this mean funeral plans or release of the body take longer?

Medical Examiners make every effort to avoid any delays and work with families and friends of the deceased to allow registering of deaths.

Medical Examiners and their team will try to be flexible, especially where relatives need access to the deceased, or release of the deceased quickly for cultural or religious reasons.

What will happen if there a post-mortem or the Coroner is involved?

If it has been decided that your relative or friend will require a post-mortem, they will then be under the care of the Coroner’s service. Post-mortems are performed at James Cook University Hospital, which means that your relative or friend will be transferred there.

Post-mortems are usually carried out within 2 - 3 working days following death and the information shared directly with the Coroner.

You will be kept fully informed, by the Coroner’s office, throughout to help you with your plans.

What can I do if I have questions or concerns about the Medical Examiner process?

If you are unhappy with the Medical Examiner’s advice, we recommend that you discuss this with staff from the Medical Examiner’s office.
Contact information

You can contact the Medical Examiner office by:

**Telephone:**
01642 383088 or 01642 383912

**Postal Address:**
Woodlands Offices
University Hospital North Tees
Hardwick
Stockton-on-Tees
TS19 8PE

nth-tr.medical.examiners@nhs.net

Opening hours: 09:00am - 4:00pm, Monday- Friday

You can also contact:

**Her Majesty's Coroner for Teesside**
The Coroner's Service
Middlesbrough Town Hall
Albert Road
Middlesbrough
TS1 2QJ

Email: teessidecoroner@middlesbrough.gov.uk

Telephone: 01642 729350
Monday to Thursday: 8:30am to 4pm
Friday: 8:30am to 3:30pm
This leaflet has been produced in partnership with patients and carers. All patient leaflets are regularly reviewed, and any suggestions you have as to how it may be improved are extremely valuable. Please write to the Clinical Governance Team, North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust, University Hospital of North Tees or Email: nth-tr.leaflets@nhs.net

Comments, Concerns, Compliments or Complaints

We are continually trying to improve the services we provide.

We want to know what we’re doing well or if there's anything which we can improve, that’s why the Patient Experience Team is here to help.

Our Patient Experience Team is here to try to resolve your concerns as quickly as possible. If you would like to contact or request a copy of our PET leaflet, please contact:

Telephone: 01642 624719
Monday – Friday, 9.30am – 4.00pm
Messages can be left on the answering machine and will be picked up throughout the day.

Freephone: 0800 092 0084

Email: nth-tr.PatientExperience@nhs.net

Out of hours if you wish to speak to a senior member of Trust staff, please contact the hospital switchboard who will bleep the appropriate person.

Telephone: 01642 617617
24 hours a day, 7 days a week

The Patient Experience Team is available to discuss your concerns in person Monday – Friday, 9.30am – 4.00pm. The office is based on the ground floor at the University Hospital of North Tees.

Data Protection and use of patient information

The Trust has developed a Data Protection, Caldicott and Disclosure Policy (IG5) in accordance with the Data Protection Legislation (General Data Protection Regulations and Data Protection Act 2018) and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. All of our staff respect this policy and confidentiality is adhered to at all times. If you require further information please contact the Information Governance Team.

Telephone: 01642 383551 or Email: nth-tr.infogov@nhs.net