

National Medical Examiner update

November 2021

Welcome

I have been encouraged by feedback from regional medical examiners and Shared Services Partnership in Wales about progress in extending the work of medical examiners to deaths in the community. There have been many positive interactions, though, as I have acknowledged previously, this is a complex area of work. The team are working with DHSC, NHS Digital and NHSX to identify more ways for providers to share patient records, and providing information on options to medical examiners. I am also conscious that Covid is still with us, and winter pressures affect all healthcare providers. This is why I did not set arbitrary deadlines: it is most important to embed the principles of medical examiner scrutiny in acute trusts, and build relationships and appropriate ways of working at a local level. Another important consideration is to establish connections with local communities and faith groups who may have particular views on how medical examiners are implemented. There is now information in the medical examiners' online resource to help with this.

I am delighted that medical examiners are continuing to increase the number and proportion of deaths for which they are providing independent scrutiny. Provisional information suggests in July-September 2021, medical examiners scrutinised 47,641 deaths in England and Wales, compared to 39,564 in the previous three months.

In this update there is more information about work to develop the medical examiners' case management system, and digitising Medical Certificates of Cause of Death. Both are complementary to the operation processes medical examiners are implementing and promise to provide extremely helpful. Thank you again for all the work you are doing. The progress is most encouraging and in coming months I am confident a growing number of bereaved people will benefit from being able to discuss causes of death and concerns with medical examiners and their officers.

Dr Alan Fletcher, National Medical Examiner

What's included in this update

- MCCD digitisation
- Good practice series – organ and tissue donation
- Health and Care bill update
- Digital system – overview of rollout plan by April 2022
- Coronavirus Act easements
- Implementation in Wales
- Deaths of patients in England who registered for the data opt-out
- Quarterly reporting
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MCCD digitisation

DHSC has commissioned NHS Business Services Authority to develop a digitised Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD). DHSC is working with relevant stakeholders including all relevant Government departments. It is anticipated that the digitised MCCD will be introduced not prior to Summer 2022. If your role involves completing MCCDs and you are interested in the supporting user research please contact nhsbsa.researchops@nhs.net

Good Practice Series

The Royal College of Pathologists has published another good practice paper for medical examiners, [organ and tissue donation](#). We are grateful to all those who have participated in discussions and contributed to drafting these papers. We plan further papers on child death reviews, post mortems, mental health and eating disorders, and anti-microbial resistance in the coming months.

Health and care bill update

Clause 124 of the Health and Care Bill on medical examiners completed House of Commons Committee stage on 26 October 2021. The Health and Care Bill will amend the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 to allow NHS bodies to appoint medical examiners instead of Local Authorities doing so. Subject to parliamentary process we do not expect the statutory medical examiner system to be introduced before Summer 2022. A [briefing paper on death certification and medical examiners](#) has been made available in the House of Commons

library.

Digital system

DHSC has commissioned NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA) to develop a national case management system for medical examiners and medical examiner officers in England.

NHSBSA are building the system based on requirements from DHSC, the National Medical Examiner and medical examiner offices. The system is currently being tested with a number of medical examiner offices in NHS acute trusts, with the feedback from these settings informing system improvements.

NHSBSA are planning to upscale the roll out of the digital system gradually from January 2022 and are keen to receive and respond to user feedback as the roll out progresses. The roll out will be coordinated through regional medical examiners.

Coronavirus Act easements

A review of the Coronavirus Act 2020 and related provisions takes place twice monthly with a six-monthly parliamentary review. The second six-monthly parliamentary review has recently taken place and concluded that the easements relating to death certification and registration are retained. This means the [guidance](#) published in March 2020 remains in place at present.

Implementation in Wales

Medical examiners are increasing the number of deaths scrutinised in both acute and community sectors, including more than 50% of deaths in acute care in Wales. Potential learning is identified and passed on to care providers in around 25% of cases, and around 25% of cases are notified to coroners.

We now have a single process for mortality reviews in primary care in Wales, following close work between the RCGP, GPC Wales, NHS Wales and Welsh Government. This will simplify medical examiner referrals of primary care cases for further review, which also require data sharing agreements to provide medical examiners with single use access to remote records in local GP clinical systems. The primary care mortality review process places medical examiners at the heart of health and care quality and safety improvement,

mirrored by a recent agreement to include death certification and medical examiners in the mandatory training programme for junior doctors in Wales.

We are now able to share cases efficiently between medical examiner offices, and respond to requests for case summaries. This is proving increasingly important as the number of public requests for information from the bereaved rises.

Deaths of patients in England who registered for the data opt-out

Where patients registered with the national data opt-out before they died, GPs will not be able to share their medical records for medical examiner scrutiny in the non-statutory system. The information available suggests numbers will not be high, and we do not expect medical examiners to scrutinise deaths of patients which registered for the national data opt-out.

Quarterly reporting - England

All medical examiner offices in England have submitted 2021/22 Quarter 2 data. As part of these returns we ask for feedback from medical examiner offices, and this has again proved overwhelmingly positive. It is particularly pleasing that there have been so many positive comments from bereaved families, as this is a key benefit of medical examiner implementation. There were also positive comments from doctors in secondary and primary care, and from bereavement and mortuary services, along with other positive endorsements such as a medical examiner nominated for staff awards. External stakeholders such as registrars and coroners continue to be positive about the impact of medical examiners. Some medical examiner offices reported identifying specific issues with care leading to service improvements. We plan to report in more detail in the next [National Medical Examiner's report](#).

The next submission windows for quarterly reporting via the online portal are:

Reporting period	Submission window
Quarter 3 -2021/22	1 January – 21 January 2022
Quarter 4 -2021/22	1 April – 22 April 2022

Information on how to access the portal has been sent previously, please contact reporting.nme@nhs.net if you have any queries.

Training and events

Currently, 1,339 senior doctors have completed medical examiner training, and just under 300 staff have completed medical examiner officer training. Further [sessions](#) are planned and will continue to be held virtually via zoom for the foreseeable future. The Royal College of Pathologists has also been working with the Judicial College on joint virtual training for coroners and medical examiners, dates are as follows:

- [13 Jan 2022 - Midlands](#)
- [27 Jan 2022 - East of England, South East and London](#)
- [22 Feb 2022 - North East and Yorkshire, North West](#)
- [10 Mar 2022 - South West](#)
- [29 Mar 2022 - Wales](#)

Contact details

We encourage you to continue to raise queries with us and share your thoughts on the introduction of medical examiners, through the [contacts](#) .

The page contains contact details for the national medical examiner’s office, the medical examiner team in Wales, and regional medical examiner contacts in England.

Further information

Further information about the programme, including previous editions of this bulletin, can be found on the [national medical examiner](#) webpage.

NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership also has a web page for the [medical examiner system in Wales](#).

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