

Medical Examiner Bulletin

Please find below the first of a series of Bulletins from the National Medical Examiner for England and Wales. A second bulletin providing an overview of the Medical Examiner Event in London on 25 April will follow shortly.

Dear Medical Director

Having been in post as National Medical Examiner for a few weeks now, I wanted to write to introduce myself and to share some updates with you about plans for roll out of the medical examiner system.

Since being in post I have heard that communications about plans for the roll out of the medical examiner system have not been as effective as they could have been. This is something that I want to address through communications like this. I don't yet have all the answers to all the questions being posed but I am determined to be clear about what is needed to deliver an effective system that is at the heart of patient safety going forwards.

I have started work to recruit a team of lead medical examiners, supported by lead medical examiner officers, in each of the English regions and in Wales. Adverts for these posts will be out in April and I'm keen to have people in post – to support me and you - by the summer.

Timescales for implementation

I know from sharing my own experience of the medical examiner role in Sheffield, that up and down the country and in Wales, there are the number of established early adopter sites. The enthusiasm shown by these and many others to start at the earliest opportunity is testament to real appetite to deliver a national system. In my role as the National Medical Examiner, I want to bring together practice across the country to deliver a truly national system.

This won't be achieved overnight and I know many providers have questions about setting up in the best way. And for those just starting on this journey, a phased roll out from the end of April 2019 makes sense to demonstrate respect for the various religious festivals occurring throughout much of April. More information will be provided at the national event on 25 April about timing and finance. To book see the Royal College of Pathologists website: <https://www.rcpath.org/event/implementing-the-medical-examiner-system-2.html>

My vision is that we use the flexibility the non-statutory process offers to deliver a system that will provide proportionate scrutiny to all non-coronial deaths. I want to enable this to be delivered for all deaths in secondary care by the end March 2020 and for all deaths by the end of March 2021. This will enable the statutory system to come into force and deliver the system that too many reports into patient safety have rightly demanded.

In my national role, I will be working closely with the Chief Coroner on how the system for scrutiny works together. I encourage you to work with local senior coroners and registrars, including to appoint those best placed for the role of medical examiner - and medical examiner officers, to support the system and make best use of medical examiners' time.

Medical examiner training

The Royal College of Pathologists provides medical examiner training. Before taking up post, medical examiners are expected to complete 26 core e-learning modules available here: <https://www.e-lfh.org.uk/programmes/medical-examiners>

In addition, all medical examiners are expected to attend a one day face to face training session within six months of taking up post. To book a place: <https://www.rcpath.org/event/medical-examiner-face-to-face-training-session-1.html>

Dates and locations throughout 2019 are as follows:-

11 th April	Sciences Hub Cardiff
16 th May	Royal College of Pathologists London
20 th June	Leeds Beckett University
10 th July	Royal College of Pathologists London
11 th Sept	Birmingham (location to be decided)
Mid Oct.	Date/location tbc
14 th Nov	Royal College of Pathologists London

Digital case management system

A digital system is in development to support the end to end management of cases handled within each medical examiner office. Following the government's service standard for digital projects, the project team are using agile delivery techniques to build the new system with a focus on user needs and experience. The system is now in the alpha phase, and in the coming months a growing number of medical examiner offices will be able to help to pilot the system and to submit real data to help test and improve it. I will give you more information about how the system is being rolled out in future notes like this one and on the medical examiner web page that is in development.

Funding for local medical examiner offices

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) is committed to the introduction of the medical examiner system in a way that is cost neutral to the NHS.

During the non-statutory phase of implementation, DHSC, NHS Improvement and NHS England will collectively support acute trusts to manage the financial impact of establishing and running local medical examiner offices. We will be providing further information on reimbursement of costs in the coming weeks. This will include more detail on how costs not covered by the fee generated from Part 5 of the Cremation form will be reimbursed. Additional funds will cover the cost of providing proportional scrutiny for burials and for deaths of children (under 18 years old), where no fees are payable. Additional funding will also be provided to cover cases where the medical examiner undertook scrutiny, but the outcome resulted in coroner investigation.

Please share this note with relevant colleagues in the NHS and for further information or specific enquiries please email nme@nhs.net.

With best wishes

Dr Alan Fletcher
National Medical Examiner