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Information about a referral to the Coroner

Rehabilitation & Support

A guide for patients and carers

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If you have been given this leaflet, you have experienced the death of someone close to you and the death of your loved one has been reported to the coroner. This leaflet will explain when and why a death needs to be referred to the coroner and what the process is so that you know what to expect. Whilst we hope this leaflet will help to clarify the process at a difficult time we are here to talk and support you through the process as much as you need.

Contacting us

In addition to this leaflet, you should also have received a letter from us, either in advance, or accompanying this information. The letter should have included the details of someone in the Trust who you can contact for support and if you have any questions. Please do get in touch with them if you want to provide comments, ask questions or raise any concerns. If you need to speak to someone immediately and have not yet received a letter from us, please contact 0151 556 5035.

Coroners' inquests

Some deaths are referred to the coroner, for example where the cause of death is unknown, or the death occurred in violent or unnatural circumstances. We are also required to report deaths to the coroner if a person has had very recent surgery or if their cancer has resulted from an industrial exposure, e.g. asbestos. When a death is referred to the coroner they may request a post mortem examination. The coroner will decide whether an inquest is required, to establish the cause of the death. An inquest is a 'fact finding' exercise which normally aims to determine the circumstances of someone's death.

We will inform you if we have referred the death to the coroner. If we do not refer a death to the coroner, but you have concerns about the treatment we provided, you can ask the coroner to consider holding an inquest. It is important to do this as soon as possible after your loved one has died, as delays in requesting an inquest may mean that opportunities for the coroner to hold a post mortem are lost.

We can provide you with contact details for the appropriate coroner's office.

If you are seeking or involved in an inquest, you may wish to find further independent information, advice or support. There are details of organisations that can advise on the process and offer support at the end of this leaflet.



What if I do not want the coroner to do a postmortem?

The coroner knows this can be a very difficult situation for families and will only carry out a post mortem after careful consideration. A family can appeal this in writing to the coroner, giving their reasons, and should let the coroner know they intend to do this as soon as possible. However, a coroner makes the final decision, and if necessary, can order a post mortem even when a family does not agree. Please note that the body of your loved one will not be released for burial until any post mortem is completed, although a coroner will do their best to minimise any delay to funeral arrangements. You can speak directly to the local coroner's office about having a post mortem and/or inquest.

Additional support and information

INQUEST

Provides free and independent advice to bereaved families on investigations, inquests and other legal processes following a death in custody and detention. This includes deaths in mental health settings. Further information is available on its website including a link to 'The INQUEST Handbook: A Guide For Bereaved Families, Friends and Advisors'

Web: www.inquest.org.uk

Tel: 020 726 3111 (*option 1*)

Patients Association

Provides advice, support and guidance to family members with a national helpline providing specialist information, advice and signposting. This does not include medical or legal advice. It can also help you make a complaint to the CQC.

Web: www.patients-association.org.uk

Tel: 020 8423 8999



How we produce our information

All of our leaflets are produced by staff at The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre and this information is not sponsored or influenced in any way. Every effort is made to ensure that the information included in this leaflet is accurate and complete and we hope that it will add to any professional advice you have had. All our leaflets are evidence based where appropriate and they are regularly reviewed and updated. If you are concerned about your health in any way, you should consult your healthcare team.

We rely on a number of sources to gather evidence for our information. All of our information is in line with accepted national or international guidelines where possible. Where no guidelines exist, we rely on other reliable sources such as systematic reviews, published clinical trials data or a consensus review of experts. We also use medical textbooks, journals and government publications.

References for this leaflet can be obtained by telephoning 0151 556 5570.

If you need this leaflet in large print, Braille, audio or different language, please call 0151 556 5570.

If you have a comment, concern, compliment or complaint, please call 0151 556 5203.

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