



C.P.J. Field.

More than a funeral director since 1690.

Medical Examiners and death certification reform

9 September 2024 marks the first major reform to the way that deaths are scrutinised for more than a generation

The way it was

It may be that you're familiar with the old system, where someone dies expectedly in the community when a GP who attended the person within the last few weeks of their life was called to come and confirm that the person has died, and having done so issued a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) which confirmed (amongst other things) date, time and cause of death. Something similar would happen in a hospice or hospital, only that the doctor was not the person's GP but had attended to them within the last few weeks of their life.

A representative of the person who had died would be contacted to collect the MCCD so that they could (having previously made an appointment) take it to the Registrar to register the death. More recently GP practices and hospitals had been in the practice of emailing the MCCD to the Registrars and informing the deceased person's representative that they could contact the Registrar to make an appointment to register the death at that point.

Once registration was complete the Registrar would send a green coloured form (the Registrar's certificate for burial or cremation or "the green form") to the chosen funeral director so that they could ultimately provide it to the cremation or burial authority to allow the funeral to proceed. In cases where cremation was chosen it was necessary to go back to the doctor that issued the MCCD to complete an additional form (the Ministry of Justice's Form Cremation 4) which also went to the cremation authority in order for the cremation to go ahead.

The cremation authority required that the Ministry of Justice's Form 1 – Application for Cremation was completed and submitted to them usually by us on your behalf.

The way it is now

With effect from 9 September 2024 every expected death in England & Wales will be referred to a Medical Examiner who will issue the MCCD directly to the Registrar who will contact the deceased person's representative to make an appointment to register the death.

An initial form will be completed by a doctor who attended the person who has died in their lifetime who will then refer the death to the Medical Examiner. The Medical Examiner will scrutinise the form and the person's medical records before having a conversation with the doctor that referred the death to them. A colleague of the Medical Examiner, known as a Medical Examiner's Officer, will speak to the deceased person's nominated contact to establish whether there is anything about the lead up to the death the Medical Examiner should be aware of (care standards for example) and their understanding of why the person died (advanced illness etc) they may also ask whether the person ever had any medical implants (pacemakers etc) fitted. This will often take place over the phone.

Once the Medical Examiner is satisfied that there are no reasons to believe that the circumstances of the person's death require further investigation they will email the MCCD to the Registrar's Office.

The deceased person's representative will then be contacted to make an appointment to Register the death. Once the death is registered the Registrar will email the green coloured form (the Registrar's certificate for burial or cremation or "the green form") to the nominated funeral director who will ultimately provide it to the cremation or burial authority so that the funeral can go ahead.

For cremation funeral; as was previously was the case you will be asked by the crematorium (via us) to complete the Ministry of Justice's Form 1 – Application for Cremation which will submit for you.

The main changes

Most of this work goes ahead automatically. As your funeral director we will remain in touch with the Medical Examiner's office on your behalf to ensure that the process is as efficient as possible. As the representative of the person who has died (normally a family member or close friend) you need to be aware that in the event of an expected death –

1. You will be contacted by a Medical Examiner's Officer to discuss the circumstances of the person's death. This is normal and not a cause for concern.
2. You will be contacted to make an appointment to register the death.
3. You need to know who your chosen funeral director is (ideally at the time of registration) so that they can be emailed the green form.
4. You can proceed with the funeral arrangements (whether the ceremony is followed by a burial or a cremation) once the green form has been issued.

In the event that the person's death was sudden or unexpected; or that the cause of death is unclear the death would be referred to HM Coroner as was previously the case.

As your funeral director, we will support you with all aspects of this process every step of the way.