



The Queen Elizabeth  
Hospital King's Lynn  
NHS Foundation Trust

Public Information

# A Guide to the Medical Examiner Service



## Who are medical examiners and medical examiner officers, and what do they do?

Medical examiners are senior NHS doctors who, after completing specialist training, work part-time in this role. Their job is to give an independent view on causes of death and the care provided (except for deaths which have to be investigated by a coroner).

Medical examiners and their staff (usually called medical examiner officers) offer families and carers of the person who died an opportunity to ask questions or raise concerns about the causes of death, or about the care the person received before their death. This will usually be through a telephone call, or sometimes a meeting. They can explain what medical language means, and make it easier to understand what happened. Medical examiners also look at relevant medical records, and discuss the causes of death with the doctor who is completing the official form (known as the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death).

You can be confident medical examiners and medical examiner officers will provide an independent view. They will never look into the causes of death of a person they provided care for.

### Coroners

Some deaths are notified to a coroner, who may decide to carry out their own independent investigation. This link explains more about coroners and the types of deaths they investigate.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/notification-of-deaths-regulations-2019-guidance>

You can also request information in other formats by emailing the Ministry of Justice at [coroners@justice.gov.uk](mailto:coroners@justice.gov.uk). The medical examiner may sometimes give the coroner medical advice in these cases, but coroners lead these investigations.

### Why am I being asked if I have any concerns?

You are being asked if you would like to have a conversation with an independent, specially trained person – the medical examiner or a medical examiner officer – about anything that may be worrying you about how the person who died was cared for. You may simply want to better understand why the person died, including by having medical terminology explained, or you may want to raise something about the care which did not feel right or ideal. This is your opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns.

Medical examiners and medical examiner officers will discuss your feedback, questions and concerns. If they consider any issues with care need further investigation, they will refer these to someone who can do this work.

As well as answering your questions, talking to a medical examiner helps the NHS provide better care for other patients and carers in future; for example, by uncovering ways in which patient and family care could be improved.

## **Can I ask the medical examiner to talk to someone else if it's too difficult for me to talk to them?**

Yes, of course. The medical examiner or medical examiner officer may contact you to ask who you would like them to talk to instead, or you can let the medical team know if you would like someone other than you to be the first point of contact. The medical examiner or their office will usually phone you before the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death is completed – but we can arrange another way of contacting you if you let us know what you prefer.

## **What questions will I be asked?**

The medical examiner or medical examiner officer will explain what is written on the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death and why, and check if you have any questions or concerns. They will also discuss the medical examiner's review and ask if you have any concerns or questions about the care the person received before their death. This is the best time for you to ask any questions and raise anything that concerns you.

## **What if I don't want to talk to the medical examiner or medical examiner officer, or I don't want to tell them about my concerns?**

We understand this is likely to be a difficult time for you and it is your choice whether you talk to a medical examiner or not. If you are not sure, you can contact the medical examiner or medical examiner officer (tel: 01553 214518/01553 214519) and ask for more information before deciding if you want to go ahead – they are trained to help bereaved people and will be very understanding.

Medical examiners and medical examiner officers provide an independent view, so if you can, we encourage you to talk to them. They can explain things to you and are specially trained to answer your questions. If medical examiners find any potential issues, they will be able to raise these with the people who were responsible for the care of the person who died, or refer the issues to someone who can investigate further. Talking to the medical examiner and medical examiner officer can help improve the care the NHS provides to other patients and carers in future.

## **What will happen if something was not right?**

The medical examiner and medical examiner officer are here to listen to your concerns and answer your questions and, if necessary, contact someone who can investigate further. Medical examiners will not investigate further themselves, as they must complete their work in the time before the death has to be registered by law.

## **Will funeral plans or release of the body take longer?**

Medical examiners make every effort to avoid any delays and work with families and carers of the person who died to meet the legal requirements for registering deaths. Medical examiners and medical examiner officers will try to be flexible, for example where relatives would like the body to be released quickly.

## What can I do if I have questions or concerns about the medical examiner process?

If you are not satisfied with the medical examiner's advice please first discuss this with staff in the medical examiner's office and, if you are still not satisfied, you can also contact [siobhan.costello@nhs.net](mailto:siobhan.costello@nhs.net) (Regional Medical Examiner Officer for Midlands & East of England).

## How can I contact the medical examiner office?

### You can contact the medical examiner office here:

Tel no: 01553 214518 / 01553 214519  
Address: Medical Examiner's Office, Queen Elizabeth Hospital,  
Gayton Road, King's Lynn, Norfolk PE30 4ET  
Email: [qehkl-tr.medicalexaminers@nhs.net](mailto:qehkl-tr.medicalexaminers@nhs.net)  
Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 9am to 4pm

Details of Trust support for those requiring assistance accessing service:  
[PALSMailbox@qehkl.nhs.uk](mailto:PALSMailbox@qehkl.nhs.uk)

You can also ask the bereavement service at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, King's Lynn to contact the medical examiner office for you on **01553 613878**.