



DEATH CERTIFICATION AND MUSLIM BURIALS

Guidance for Sheffield GPs

The LMC has been in discussion with Sheffield Muslim Burial Forum, Sheffield GP Collaborative and the Coroner regarding a proposal for assisting with the problem of obtaining death certificates for Muslim families in expected deaths out of hours.

This is in response to a number of incidents where families have experienced added distress in trying to obtain the necessary legal paperwork to expedite their relative's burial.

In a situation where the GP is aware of an expected death/palliative situation in a Muslim patient, then the GP should complete a GP Collaborative 'Special Notes Form' which should be sent on to the GP Collaborative. This form should state whether or not the GP would be prepared to be contacted out of hours in the event of an expected death.

Where the GP has indicated that they can be contacted, the GP Collaborative (not the relatives or the police) will contact the GP directly and make them aware of the need for a death certificate. The GP can then arrange for the certificate to be collected at an appropriate time and place.

Having made enquiries with the Coroner, the LMC understands that this would involve approximately 35-45 deaths per year in Sheffield.

Please note that this:

- **is a voluntary arrangement that some GPs, out of their good nature, may wish to offer at a time of distress for Muslim families;**
- **does not apply to Muslim deaths that were unexpected or which occurred in suspicious circumstances. These must proceed through the normal coroner's office channels.**

Emergency Burial Service

The Register Office offers a service on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays from 0900 hours to 1700 hours and is accessed via Tel: 07802 864178 / 07764 661143. The service offered is to issue the Green Form 9 to facilitate a funeral at short notice for a burial or cremation in this country. The family would then need to return to register the death in the following week.

The service offered would not allow repatriation – families would need to contact the Coroner in that instance. As with GPs, the Registrar **cannot** authorise a funeral if the death is one where the coroner needs to be involved.

Coroner's Office

The coroner's office is generally unable to provide an out of hours service, other than in circumstances such as transplant requests or murders. However, there is specific provision at weekends for the coroner to deal with applications to remove a body from the country (eg return to Pakistan for funeral). Contact should be made through the duty technician at the Medico Legal Centre, between 0900 hrs and 1800 hrs via Tel: (0114) 2738721.

Additionally, in exceptional circumstances the duty technician will be able to contact the Coroner for advice. The GP should be aware that the on call telephone is staffed by one of the mortuary staff and not by a Coroner's Officer.

Medical Examiner's Pilot

There has been agreement between the coroner's office and the Muslim community that where the Medical Examiner's Pilot threatens to delay a funeral that could otherwise proceed, that death will be pulled out of the pilot to avoid undue delay.

It is suggested that when a GP completes a 'Special Notes Form' for the GP Collaborative for an expected death, a notification to the Medical Examiner's office within office hours is also done. Notification could be by email (sht-tr.MedicalExaminersOffice@nhs.net) or fax (0114 2714890) of a summary record and expected cause of death, with the details of the GP who would be willing to issue the certificate. This would ensure correct wording of the certificate and so prevent potential difficulties with the Register Office at the point of registration.

Further Information

General Practitioners Committee (GPC) guidance for GPs - *Confirmation and certification of death* – is available from the *Other Guidance* section of the LMC website:

<http://bma.org.uk/practical-support-at-work/gp-practices/service-provision/confirmation-and-certification-of-death>

Further information and advice on Muslim burials can be obtained from Sheffield Muslim Burial Forum via email to ibrar.hussain@sheffield.gov.uk or telephone 07866571750.