

Coronavirus Act

Changes to death registration in England and Wales

27.03.20

The General Register Office has released guidance on changes to death registration, enabling modifications to registration processes. The provisions now in place allow the following:

MCCD for registration purposes

A medical certificate can be accepted from any medical practitioner as long as they are able to state to the best of their knowledge the cause of death.

Registrars can accept MCCDs without referral to the coroner, provided it contains an acceptable cause of death, and indicates that a medical practitioner has seen the deceased either within the 28 days prior to death, or after death (this does not need to be the certifying medical practitioner).

While these provisions are in force, if it is indicated that a patient was seen in the 28 days prior to death by video link (such as Skype) this should be accepted as seen. This (video link) does not however meet the requirement for seen after death.

Advice on Covid-19 as a cause of death was provided in circular 02/2020.

Signing of the MCCD

Provision for any registered medical practitioner to issue a MCCD without having personally attended the deceased, provided they are sufficiently able, from the available information, to ascertain the cause of death.

The declaration on MCCDs will be amended as necessary by certifying doctors. This will show whether or not they have been in medical attendance and if not whether another doctor has seen the deceased after death and/or within 28 days prior to death.

The after-death requirement will be through the existing ringed boxes on the MCCD.

If there is no other reason for the death to be referred to the coroner, the MCCD should be accepted. If possible, registration officers should liaise with their local surgeries and hospitals to ascertain a list of possible signatories and their GMC numbers.

The registration

Permission is granted to remove the requirement for a death or still-birth informant to attend and provide details in person and the requirement for them to sign the register where a local authority can no longer offer face to face service registrations or where this is needed by way of additional contingency.

This will enable the information for the registration to be collected by telephone. When registering by telephone, in the signature box (space 8 of the death entry) registrars should record the full name of the informant followed by the words 'information given by telephone' (the same wording should be used for still-birth registrations).

It is possible for telephone registration to be undertaken from the office or remotely and each authority should direct on practice for their area.

Remote registration

If working remotely registrars will still require secure e-mail links in order to receive and send information.

If without print facilities, registrars will need to register manually, although information will still be able to be captured onto RON. In such cases the RON entry should be completed after the register page has been signed by the registrar and they have added their designation. After capturing to RON, the entry can be locked.

The disposal form can also be completed manually and as an option, once signed off, it can be photographed and sent on to the relevant authority as an email attachment with the original being retained.

Qualified informants

The list of qualified informants is temporarily extended to include a funeral director (where they are acting on behalf of the family)

Funeral directors are an addition to the existing list of qualified informants rather than a replacement, family members are still allowed (and may be preferred).

Where a funeral director does act as informant their designation shall be recorded as "Causing the body....." and the words 'Funeral Director' should be recorded after their surname, in the informant surname field.

Electronic transmission of documents

The provisions also allow for the electronic transfer of documents relating to the certification and registration process (e.g. transfer of the MCCD from the medical practitioner to the registrar and the form for burial or cremation (the Green), from the registrar to the relevant authority).

It is not envisaged that scanned documents should be received via a third party.

Under this arrangement these documents can be scanned or photographed and sent as an attachment, though a wet signature is still required on the original.

For MCCDs medical practitioners should be provided with a secure (local authority) email address to send to.

Disposal forms can be completed manually and similarly scanned or photographed for onward sending. Registrars should engage to find an email address for the relevant authority (local burial and crematorium authority); which could be a local authority shared mailbox (as long as the relevant person at the crematorium or cemetery can access it) as well as an address for returning counterfoils.

After the emergency period, arrangements should be made to have all original forms sent to the register office to be processed in the normal manner.