



King's College Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust

Bereavement support

Information for families and friends
at the Princess University Hospital



Princess Royal
University Hospital
Orpington
BR6 8ND

We would like to offer you, your family and friends our sympathy at this time. We realise that the days and weeks to come may be difficult for you.

This booklet provides practical help and advice about what to do when someone dies.

Please do not hesitate to ask questions or raise any concerns. Our bereavement and mortuary team will always be pleased to help you, please use the contact information at the bottom of this page.

Princess Royal University Hospital Bereavement Services
Telephone: 01689 863 586
Email: kch-tr.mortuaryPRUH@nhs.net

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Sudden and unexpected death

A sudden, accidental or unexpected death shatters the world as we know it. It is often a loss that does not make sense. The sudden death leaves us feeling shaken, unsure and vulnerable. The grief response following a sudden loss is often intensified since there is little to no opportunity to prepare for the loss, say goodbye, finish unfinished business or prepare for bereavement. We are suddenly forced to face the loss of our loved one instantaneously without warning.

A sudden tragic event shatters our sense of order and thrusts us into a world changed forever. We may experience a greater sense of vulnerability and heightened anxiety.

The safe world we once knew no longer exists. We fear for our family and ourselves and we may become preoccupied with thoughts that this will happen again.

It is incredibly important that you try to take care of yourself. You are dealing with an event that is beyond your control and it is very important to do things that help you re-establish your sense of control over your world. It is important to focus on the basics the body needs for day-to-day survival. Take it one hour at a time, one day at a time; taking care of yourself is so important.

Post-mortem examinations required by the Coroner

Post-mortem examinations provide valuable information on the cause of death.

These are investigations required by law at the request of the Coroner and do not require the agreements of relatives.

The Coroner

Coroners are independent judicial officials, responsible for investigating deaths that may not have natural causes or when the cause is unknown. Some Coroners are doctors; however, the majority of Coroners are lawyers.

When is a death reported to a Coroner?

Registrars of Births and Deaths, doctors or the Police, report deaths to a Coroner in certain circumstances. These include where it appears that:

- The cause of death appears to be unknown
- The death was due to an industrial accident, disease or poisoning
- The death was sudden or unexpected
- The death was unnatural
- The death was due to violence or neglect
- The death was in other suspicious circumstances
- The death occurred in prison or Police custody

South London Coroner
2nd Floor, Davis House, Robert Street, London. CR01QQ
Telephone: 020 8313 1883
Open 8am - 12 noon and 1 - 3pm
Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays)
Email: admin.coroner@croydon.org.uk
Website: www.southlondoncoroner.org

Coroner's post-mortem examination

A full post-mortem examination is a medical examination of a body, carried out by a Pathologist in order to establish a cause of death.

This is the most common type of post-mortem examination, ordered by the Coroner to find out why someone has died. This is usually when the death is unexpected or the result of an accident, suicide or suspicious circumstance.

The next of kin will be informed, but in these circumstances the post-mortem examination is a legal requirement and the consent of next of kin is not required. It is possible for the family to have a medical representative at the post-mortem, but most families do not feel that this is necessary. You should speak to the Coroner's Office as soon as possible if you think you need to arrange this – and explain your reasons.

When is the post-mortem performed?

A post-mortem examination needs to be performed as soon as possible, usually within a few days of death, to avoid loss of information.

You should be informed of the date and time the post-mortem will take place. Only very rarely will a Coroner's post-mortem be performed without relatives' knowledge and this will usually be due to the Coroner not being able to locate the family.

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Can my loved one be seen before and after a post-mortem?

On occasion before a post-mortem, due to ongoing Police enquiries it may be that a family can only view their loved ones from behind a glass window. After a post-mortem, staff will endeavour to make it possible for family members to view their loved ones in the room in which they rest.

Please telephone the Princess Royal University Hospital to make an appointment between 8am and 4pm Monday to Friday.

The telephone number is: 01689 863 586.

Will organs or tissue be retained after a post-mortem?

During the course of a post-mortem examination the Pathologist may retain a stamp-sized tissue sample and/or Toxicology samples for further examination. A Coroner's Officer will discuss this with you in detail.

Very rarely a Pathologist may wish to retain an organ for further examination but this is in exceptional circumstances. A Coroner's Officer will inform you if this happens.

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Post-mortem examination report

This report gives details of the examination made on the deceased and is sent to the Coroner by the Pathologist who carried out the post-mortem examination.

It may also give details of any tests that have been carried out to determine the cause of death.

Copies of the report are normally available only to the interested persons.

Following the post-mortem examination the Pathologist will discuss the cause of death with the Coroner, who will then instruct the release of the deceased to the family-appointed Funeral Director.

The Coroner will forward relevant documentation to the Registrar of Births and Deaths, stating the cause of death, so that the death can be registered.

If the death is not established at the post-mortem examination, the Coroner will open and adjourn an investigation until enquiries into the circumstances of the death are completed.

The investigation will be reviewed at a date and time set by the Coroner.

In the meantime the Coroner will issue the necessary documentation to allow the funeral to take place.

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What is an inquest?

An inquest will be opened if the investigation determines that the cause of death was unnatural. An inquest is a formal court hearing at which a Coroner must establish who has died and how, where and when the death occurred.

The staff at the Coroner's Office are extremely helpful and will answer any questions that you may have. You can contact them at:

South London Coroner
2nd Floor, Davis House, Robert Street, London. CR01QQ
Telephone: 020 8313 1883
Open 8am - 12 noon and 1 - 3pm
Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays)
Email: admin.coroner@croydon.org.uk
Website: www.southlondoncoroner.org

When can a death be registered?

When a Coroner's enquiries, with or without a post-mortem, satisfy the Coroner that a death was not unnatural the Coroner will inform the Registrar of Births and Deaths that an investigation is not required. The Registrar will then register the death using the Pathologist's post-mortem findings, which must be provided by the Coroner.

If the Coroner decides that the death was not natural or if further post-mortem tests are required, an investigation will be opened for the death to be recorded. It will then be adjourned until the Coroner's Officer or Police enquiries are completed. Meanwhile, the Coroner can issue a 'Coroner's Certificate of the Fact of Death', to allow personal affairs to be administered. The death cannot be registered until the Coroner informs the Registrar of the outcome of the resumed and completed inquest or any criminal proceedings. When a death is registered, the Registrar will provide a certified copy of the entry in the Register of Deaths and a fee will be charged. This is the Death Certificate and additional copies should be requested at the time of registration as they will cost more if requested at a later stage.

Registering the death

The death is normally registered by a relative. If no relatives are available please contact the Register Office to discuss further options.

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When registering a death you will need to give the Registrar the following information regarding the deceased.

- Their date and place of Birth
- The date and place of death
- Their last occupation
- The deceased's usual address at time of death
- Their full name and any other names they were known by (including maiden surname if the deceased was a married woman/civil partner)
- If the deceased was married, widowed or registered as a formal civil partnership, the full name and occupation of their spouse or civil partner
- Was the deceased in receipt of any pensions or allowances from Government funding?

It may be useful, although not essential, to have the deceased's passport or birth certificate with you to confirm the correct information; however, you should ensure that you are able to give the Registrar the correct spellings of the deceased's names.

If there are any details that you are unsure about, the Registrar will advise you.

As the person registering the death, the Registrar will also require information about you. This will include:

- Your relationship to the deceased
- Your full name and your usual address

When can the funeral be arranged?

Only the Coroner can release a body for burial or cremation and this will be done as soon as possible. This may be immediately following a post-mortem, but laboratory tests of tissues, crucial in confirming the cause of death, can sometimes delay arrangements. The Coroner may agree that the funeral can take place before all laboratory tests are complete. A Coroner's Officer, if necessary, will discuss this in detail with you.

A Coroner's Officer will maintain contact and keep you up to date every step of the way.

Families can make contact with their chosen Funeral Director and begin arrangements for the funeral. If the deceased has made a will you should check the will for any special requests.

Register Office details

Telephone: 0300 303 8667

Bromley Registry Office, Civic Centre, Stockwell Close
Bromley. BR1 3UH

Arranging a funeral

The choice of Funeral Director is important, as you should feel comfortable and confident in their ability to arrange a funeral according to your instruction. You may wish to ask questions about their arrangements, for example:

- Whether a viewing can be arranged at the funeral home
- What costs are involved

Costs for the same service may vary considerably from one Funeral Director to another, and you may wish to obtain more than one quote.

If you think you may have difficulty meeting the cost of the funeral and you are in receipt of certain state benefits then the Social Fund may be able to help. You will need a SF200 form to make a claim and this can be made up to three months following the funeral.

Please note that most funerals will require a deposit even when the Social Fund is being used. SF200 forms are available from the Register office and your local Jobcentre Plus.

Social Fund Enquiries
Telephone: 0845 603 6967

www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-social-fund-technical-guidance

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams. The PALS office is in the main hospital foyer at PRUH and they would be happy to advise you.

PALS at Princess Royal University Hospital, Farnborough Common, Orpington, Kent BR6 8ND

Tel: **01689 863252**

Email: kch-tr.palspruh@nhs.net

If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact our Communications and Interpreting telephone line on 020 3299 4826 or email kch-tr.accessibility@nhs.net

