

Launch of Consultation on Reforms to Death Certification

At this week's Global Patient Safety Summit, the Secretary of State for Health announced a package of measures to improve safety and transparency within the NHS – to help build a safer service for patients seven days a week. He confirmed that from April 2018, independent medical examiners with expertise will scrutinise and confirm the cause of all deaths not subject of a coroner investigation. This was originally recommended by the Shipman Inquiry, and subsequently by Robert Francis following the events of Mid Staffs.

The aims of the reforms are to strengthen safeguards for the public, make the process simpler and more open for the bereaved, increase the quality of certification and data about causes of death: if any death needs to be investigated and if there is cause for concern, appropriate action will be taken.

The Department of Health is now consulting on the proposed reforms and has published a consultation document describing how the new death certification process and medical examiner system will work in practice. The consultation seeks views about certain aspects of the system and on the accompanying draft regulations, which will provide the framework for death certification in England and Wales.

The intention of this consultation is to identify any gaps in the death certification process and to seek views on some specific proposals. It is aimed at local authorities who will have to establish a medical examiner service, health and care professionals involved in the process as well as members of the public and all service providers involved when a death occurs.

Feedback on this consultation will help to ensure the successful implementation of the new regulations and any associated guidance. The changes are intended to come into effect in April 2018.

In this consultation, the Ministry of Justice is consulting on introducing a statutory duty on registered medical practitioners to report deaths in prescribed circumstances to the coroner for investigation. This section of the consultation seeks views about making changes to cremation regulations when the current role of the medical referee who authorises cremations at a crematorium will be abolished, when medical examiners are introduced.

The consultation runs until 15 June 2016. Participants are encouraged to read the related documents before responding. The consultation and supporting documents can be found at www.gov.uk/government/consultations/death-certification-reforms

Enquiries or responses to the consultation should be sent by email to: deathcertificationconsultation@dh.gsi.gov.uk

The Welsh Government will consult separately on the arrangements for appointing and funding medical examiners in Wales, after the forthcoming National Assembly for Wales elections.