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Health and Sport Committee



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Dear Duncan

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CERTIFICATION OF DEATH (SCOTLAND) ACT 2011**

I am writing to you in relation to the Certification of Death (Scotland) Act 2011. As the Committee will recall, the Act received Royal Assent on 20 April 2011.

I wrote to the Committee earlier this year to provide you with a copy of the independent evaluation of the death certification test sites. At that time I indicated that we were working towards implementation of the new death certification system by April 2014. I am writing to advise that we are now working towards implementation by April 2015.

This change in implementation date arises from our plans to introduce electronic Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (eMCCD) forms into the NHS. The Committee will recall that this was one of its recommendations during the passage of the Bill in 2010. At that time the then Committee Convener stated in Parliament:

*'The committee thought that the proposed new scrutiny system could be improved through the use of modern technology to collect, collate and analyse information on causes of death... An electronic system would have obvious advantages... In the light of the benefits of an electronic system, the committee strongly urged the Scottish Government to provide for the use of such a system for death certification before national roll-out.'*

At the time we were not able to commit to the introduction of such a solution, but things have moved on since the passage of the Bill. For example, we are currently completing the digitisation of the reporting of deaths to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service by doctors in the NHS. As a result of this experience I now believe it is possible for us to implement electronic MCCD forms across the NHS within the next 12 months.

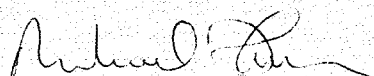
I would agree with the Committee's position as stated in 2010 that the benefits such a step would bring – in terms of improving the quality and accuracy of MCCDs, and in reducing the burden on certifying doctors – means it is important we implement such a system before rolling-out the new death certification system.

Implementing in April 2015 will also enable us to scope the potential to upgrade the National Records of Scotland systems, with a view to making it possible for these systems to also use eMCCDs in the future. If this is possible it will provide even greater benefits under the new death certification system, including the ability to transfer MCCDs more quickly to Medical Reviewers, and to reduce to a minimum potential delays to the public which may result from the review process.

Commencing in April 2015 will also ensure we are able to learn any lessons there may be from the Vale of Leven Inquiry, prior to implementation.

My officials are today alerting key stakeholders to this development, but I expect broad support for the move in light of the likely benefits eMCCDs will bring.

I intend to write to the Committee again in 2014, once we have progressed implementation of eMCCDs in the NHS, and at that time I will provide further details on the practical operation of eMCCDs in relation to the new independent scrutiny system under the Certification of Death (Scotland) Act 2011.



**MICHAEL MATHESON**