



## **Excess Deaths due to Pandemic - Are you Ready?**

It is widely predicted that at some stage in the future a Pandemic will arrive causing excess deaths and therefore an increased demand for cremation and burial services. Proper planning for burial ground and crematoria managers is essential.

Taking the worst possible prediction it is estimated that in a fifteen week period your service may have to accommodate as many funerals as are normally conducted in a year. Therefore you have to be prepared!

The following are a few bullet points for you to consider and challenge your service with:

### **Planning Considerations**

- Do you know what your corporate emergency management plan is for a pandemic? Are you in regular dialogue with emergency planning officers?
- Do you have a business continuity plan in place?
- Have you produced a robust pandemic plan for your burial and/or cremation service? This is separate to a business continuity plan.
- Has this plan been tested as part of a desktop exercise or as part of a wider forum?
- Do you know what the projected clinical attack rate and fatality rate is for your area? Can you meet this capacity? If not what is your contingency plan?

### **Staffing Issues**

- Have you briefed all of your staff including operational and administrative members of what will be required of them during a pandemic?
- Are you aware that you have to account for sickness absence of not only your own staff but also your back up staff and that you will need to feed in additional staff to cover this?
- Do you know where you are getting the additional staff from? Within the local Authority, agency?
- Have you briefed staff required to move into your service area to work on a temporary basis?
- Have you consulted trade unions and other senior managers in your organisation so everyone is aware what is going on and what is expected?
- Have potential back up staff been provided with information, training and experience?

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## Operational Issues

- Have you purchased additional materials that you will need and may be in short supply when the pandemic arrives?
- Have you considered the impact of longer cremator operation and is your equipment up to the job?
- Have you identified sufficient burial space and methods of working to meet capacity?
- What burial system are you going to adopt? (i.e. traditional or trench burial) It is worth considering a system that will allow a spouse to be buried with the deceased to avoid possible exhumation requests at a later date.
- Have you arranged to service and check key equipment such as digging machines and cremators as the number of funerals booked begins to increase?
- Have you considered the impact on your current 24 hour burial services for those with a cultural need? Will you be providing this, if so how? If not have you consulted these groups?
- How are you going to deal with cremated remains during the pandemic? Will you store them for a long period until after the pandemic has passed? If so, where?

## Stakeholders

- Have you briefed your key stakeholders on your pandemic plans?
- Have you notified them of any changes to your usual level of service that may be implemented as the death rate increases?
- Have you prepared pre-written communication sheets for stakeholders and submitted them to your corporate communications department so they can be quickly released when required?
- Do you know what preparations have been put in place by your stakeholders in relation to their own pandemic plans?

## Recovery

- Have you considered the financial implications of a pandemic such as stakeholders inability to pay fees and possible replacement of worn out equipment?
- Have you considered staffing issues following on from a pandemic such as stress, leave requirements etc
- Are there plans in place to provide adequate counselling for staff post pandemic?
- Will you be able to cope with demands for memorial services after the pandemic?

These are all valid questions you should be challenging your service with. The ICCM are of course here to help and advise you on pandemic issues.