

*Help & advice in the first few days
following a death in hospital*

*A brief guide for bereaved relatives and
friends*

The first few days after the death

There is no normal or right way to feel following bereavement and most people experience a whole range of emotions.

This booklet aims to try and make the early days less difficult by providing some practical and emotional advice.

Bereavement Officer

The Bereavement Officer is informed of all deaths in Lewisham Hospital and is able to help bereaved family and friends through the immediate administrative process following death.

There is a legal process following death so please make sure you contact the Bereavement Officer on **020 8333 3431** before making an appointment to register the death. If you do not do this the registrar may be unable to complete the registration and you will then need to make a second appointment.

A Medical Cause of Death Certificate is required by the Registrar to register the death. A Hospital Doctor will issue the certificate and the Bereavement Officer will liaise with you as to when this is available.

To contact the Bereavement Officer about the Medical Cause of Death Certificate please ring 020 8333 3431

between 10 am and 12 noon Mondays to Fridays.

The necessary papers will be processed as quickly as possible.

If there is any reason for a delay, the Bereavement Officer will explain this to you when you ring.

In certain circumstances, some deaths may be referred to the Coroner for further investigation which can delay issuing the Medical Cause of Death Certificate. The Bereavement Officer will be able to give you information if this should happen. Please also see the section on 'Special Situations' in this booklet for more information.

Personal possessions

The Bereavement Officer will be able to give you information on collecting any personal possessions.

Viewing the deceased

The Bereavement Officer can arrange a time for you to visit the deceased at the hospital or you can ring the Hospital Mortuary on **020 8333 3000 x 6216**. Out of office hours please ring the ward.

Registering the death

Lewisham Hospital and Lewisham Register Office are working together to make registering a death easier. Almost all deaths are now registered in the Lewisham Hospital Register Office. When you book the appointment you will be advised of the location.

Where you register

If the death occurred in the Borough of Lewisham, it must be registered within 5 days. Please contact:

Lewisham Register Office

020 8690 2128 or out of hours on **020 8314 6000**

Appointments are available from 9.30 to 3.35pm
Monday to Friday

Who should register the death

- a relative of the deceased
- any adult present when the death occurred
- a person who instructs the undertaker about the funeral arrangements

What you will need to take

- the Medical Cause of Death Certificate (where possible the hospital will try and send the certificate to the Register Office. If the death has been referred to the Coroner they will issue a certificate direct to the Register Office).

What questions you will be asked

- when and where did the death occur
- the full name and address of the deceased person
- if the deceased was a married woman, her maiden name
- the deceased's date and place of birth
- their occupation
- the deceased's marital/civil partnership status
- if a married woman or widow, her husband's full name and occupation
- if married, the date of birth of the surviving spouse
- If a civil partnership, details of the surviving partner

What the registrar will give you

- a Certificate for Burial or Cremation
- a certified copy of the death certificate which costs approximately £4.00 (please note: this is a different certificate to the Medical Cause of Death Certificate)
- extra copies of the death certificate can be requested at approximately £4.00 per copy which may be needed for insurance, bank, pension purposes etc
- Form BD8 to notify the Department of Works and Pensions of the death

Registering the death elsewhere

Deaths cannot be registered elsewhere. However, if it is more convenient, you can go to another Register Office where they will take the necessary information about the death. This will be sent to the Lewisham Register Office on your behalf.

If you do go to another Register Office, you will not be issued with any documents immediately. These will be posted to you by Lewisham Register Office. Please note this could delay any funeral arrangements.

Just Once Service

Introduction

The Just Once service can reduce the amount of time you need to spend contacting government departments and organisations after a death. The service is optional and free of charge, it is delivered straight after the death registration, so the informant does not need to leave the register office to notify key government departments of the change in circumstances.

If the informant chooses to use this service at the time of the registration, the Registrar will set up the deceased's details on the Just Once national database.

What information will I need to use Just Once?

To make sure we give the right information we need the following information about the person who has died:

- National Insurance Number (this can be found on all correspondence issued to the deceased by DWP and HMRC)
- Details of any benefits or services they were receiving
- UK Drivers licence number (if applicable)
- UK Passport number (if applicable)

We may also ask for information about:

- Their next of kin
- Any surviving husband/wife or civil partner
- The person dealing with their estate

The Registrar will go into more detail during the appointment.

What documents will I need to bring to use Just Once?

You will need to bring the following documents:

- Their National Insurance number
- Details of the next of kin
- Details of the person dealing with the estate
- The deceased's driving licence and passport (if available)
- Information about any benefits the deceased was receiving

What happens next?

After you have used the service, the relevant government departments and services will be contacted quickly on your behalf. Depending on your circumstances these may include:

- Adult Services (social care for adults)
- Children's Services
- Council Housing
- Council Tax Office
- Disability and Carers Service
- DVLA (driving licence agency)
- HM Revenue and Customs (for Child Benefit, Tax Credits and personal taxation)
- Passport Service
- Pension Service

If you would like to find out more please visit our website at www.lewisham.gov.uk or ring our staff on 020 8690 2128.

Lewisham Register Office
368 Lewisham High Street
Lewisham
London SE13 6LQ
Tel: 020 8690 2128
Fax: 020 8314 1078
Email: register.office@lewisham.gov.uk
Website: www.lewisham.gov.uk

Special Situations

The Coroner

Some deaths have to be referred to the Coroner eg when the death was unexpected, was the result of an accident, occurred within 24 hours of a hospital admission or occurred during an operation or within 14 days of the operation.

In these cases, the hospital cannot issue the Medical Cause of Death Certificate. If a death is referred to the Coroner, they will issue the Medical Cause of Death Certificate to the Register Office once inquiries have been completed. If the death of your relative or friend is referred to the Coroner, the Bereavement Officer will discuss this with you. The Bereavement Officer can be contacted on **020 8333 3431**.

Please note that if a death is referred to the Coroner, permission is not required to carry out a post-mortem examination.

The Coroner for Lewisham is:

Inner South London Coroner's Office,
1 Tennis Street, London, SE1 1YD
Tel 020 7525 4200

Hospital Post-Mortem

A hospital doctor may ask you for permission to carry out a hospital post-mortem examination. This can help doctors to understand the reason why a death occurred and may help others with similar conditions in the future. They will discuss the post-mortem with you and ensure that you have written information about the post-mortem procedure which you can take away and consider. You will be under no pressure to agree to a post-mortem if you do not wish one to be carried out.

Burial abroad

A funeral director will be able to help you arrange for a burial outside England (this includes burial in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and Eire). You will need to buy at least two certified copies of the death certificate (check with the consulate or embassy of the country of destination regarding how many you will need). The death certificate should be given to the funeral director who will obtain an **Out of England Certificate**.

Arranging a funeral

Choosing a funeral director

(The Trust cannot recommend any particular funeral director)

You do not need to hurry to make funeral arrangements unless there are cultural or religious reasons for doing so.

The deceased may have left written instructions in their will or personal papers expressing their wishes regarding any funeral arrangements.

Before any arrangement can be made the funeral director will need the Certificate of Burial or Cremation, which the Registrar will give you. The funeral director will contact the hospital and arrange to bring the deceased to their 'Chapel of Rest'.

There are no universal standards applying to funeral directors but some are members of a professional organisation operating under a code of conduct. The National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD) and the Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF) are two examples of these. You can get further information from your public library or from the following website www.uk-funerals.co.uk

Details of funeral directors can also be found in Yellow pages or Thompson Local.

What kind of funeral

There are two kinds of funeral: burial or cremation. A burial may take place in a churchyard or at a cemetery. You may be able to choose a shared grave, in which case the costs will be less. The deceased will be buried in an individual coffin but in a grave with several other people. It may not be possible in this case to erect an individual headstone, but some cemeteries allow a small stone or plaque to be placed on the grave. If you choose a cremation you can decide what to do with the ashes. They can be kept, buried or scattered at the crematorium or in a place special to you. Burial or scattering does not have to take place immediately or at all; the ashes may be kept in a casket.

The funeral ceremony can take many forms and anyone can take the ceremony - it can be a family friend or a religious leader. You may want to listen to particular music, poetry or readings. What is most important is that you try and arrange the funeral service you want and that you feel best reflects the memory of your loved one. Most cemeteries and crematoriums allow 20-40 minutes for a funeral service. If you want more time, it's important to discuss this with the Funeral Director so it can be arranged.

Funeral costs

You may be entitled to help with funeral costs if you receive certain benefits. Please see 'Useful Telephone Numbers' at the end of this booklet.

When someone close to you dies

How you might be feeling

Grief is very painful and affects different people in different ways at different times. Individual experience is very personal and all feelings are valid.

You may experience many emotions: sadness, helplessness, anger, relief, shame, fear, numbness or find yourself reliving events. These are all normal emotions and your way of coming to terms with the particular circumstances of the death of someone close to you.

Sometimes these feelings can seem overwhelming. Your GP will understand and may be able to put you in touch with a local support group.

How you can be physically affected

Emotional turmoil causes tension and stress, which can result in tiredness and exhaustion. Lack of sleep or an inability to rest or relax is not uncommon. Stiffness may be the result of muscle tension or you may experience localised pain such as headaches, throat or chest ailments.

If you are at all worried about your own health you should consult your GP.

What you can do to help yourself

Try to talk about what has happened with your family, close friends or sympathetic support group.

- Do not be afraid to accept offers of help making funeral arrangements, if that is what you want.
- Do not be hurried into making decisions until you are ready - especially arranging the funeral.
- Take care with any financial arrangements; if you do not understand something, get someone you trust to help you.
- The Funeral Director will help and advise you if you have a limited amount of money to spend on a funeral. Don't be afraid to let them know.
- Take care of yourself - eat properly and try to rest.
- Your family doctor is there to help - do not be afraid to contact them.
- Your local religious or faith community may be of help even if you are not a practising member.
- Take your time adjusting to life before making any major changes.
- Remember - everyone grieves differently and for different lengths of time. All sorts of mixed feelings and emotions are normal when you have been bereaved.
- Remember that children also experience similar feelings and may need to share in the grief process.

Where to find help

- Your GP
- Lewisham Bereavement Counselling
c/o Deptford Methodist Mission
Creek Road
London SE8 2BT
Tel 020 8692 6252
- The Hospital Chaplaincy or local religious leader.
- Forget Me Not

Lewisham Hospital holds an annual ceremony to remember and celebrate children and babies who have died. Bereaved families, friends and carers of children and babies (whether miscarried, stillborn or subsequently died) are warmly invited to attend. The event is non-religious and open to people of any faith or none. It is usually held on the first Sunday in December at 4pm.

- Remember Me

Lewisham Hospital holds an annual ceremony to remember and celebrate all those who have died and were associated in any way with University Hospital Lewisham. Bereaved families, friends, staff and carers are warmly invited to attend. The event is non-religious and open to people of any faith or none. It is usually held on the last Sunday in November at 4pm.

For more information please contact:
Lewisham Hospital Chaplaincy Service
Tel 020 8333 3299 or e-mail tlh-tr.chaplaincyuhl@nhs.net

Useful telephone numbers

Lewisham Hospital Main Switchboard

020 8333 3000

Lewisham Hospital Bereavement Officer

020 8333 3431

Lewisham Hospital Chaplaincy

020 8333 3299

Lewisham Hospital Patient Advice & Liaison Service (PALS)

020 8333 3355

Lewisham Register Office

020 8690 2128

Coroner for Inner South District of Greater London

020 7525 4200

Making a gesture

Some bereaved families find comfort in making a donation in the name of their loved one. This may result in new equipment or better facilities for other patients and their families. If you wish to find out more about making a donation please contact the Bereavement Officer on **020 8333 3431**.

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Reference: Lewisham Healthcare NHS Trust Bereavement Book
Review Date: 12/09/14
Publication Date: 12/09/12

