



**Northumbria Healthcare**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# **A guide for community referrals to the coroner's office in North Tyneside & Northumberland**

Issued by the specialist palliative care team

## Introduction

You have been given this leaflet because you or the person you care for/family member may be referred to the Coroner after you/they die. This sometimes means the police will attend after the death. This leaflet will hopefully explain why that is the case and what might happen. We appreciate how difficult some of this information may be for you but we want you to be more prepared so you have an insight into the process that could occur.

## What is a coroner?

A coroner is a type of judge, who is appointed by the Crown. Their role is to consider the information given to them to determine the cause or circumstances when someone dies. Coroners must have a legal background, so to become a coroner, you must be a barrister or solicitor. Some coroners also have a medical qualification on top of their legal training.

The doctor who has looked after you/the person you care for, will identify and assess if a referral to the coroner is required by completing a form called the 'coroner's checklist' (before you or the person you care for/family member dies).

## What is the 'coroner's checklist'?

The 'coroner's checklist' is a form completed by a doctor for patients who are entering the last weeks or days of their life in the North Tyneside & Northumberland area. This checklist provides healthcare professionals with information regarding what to do after the death.

## By law the Coroner needs to be referred patients who:

- Have been exposed to asbestos/mesothelioma or any occupational disease.
- Have had a fall with an injury which possibly may have contributed to the dying process.
- Have had surgery or a procedure in the last 12 months.
- Have had surgery in excess of 12 months ago which could possibly have contributed to the dying process.
- Have had concerns raised from the family regarding their recent care or treatment.
- Have had any issues raised by the police or health care professionals.
- Are dying possibly due to an unnatural or suspicious cause.
- Are currently detained under the Mental Health Act.

If you or the person you care for/your family member fulfils any of these criteria, a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) cannot be issued without a discussion with the coroner's office.

In some cases, if the cause of death is clear and there are no other factors, the coroner will ask your own doctor to complete a MCCD. If not, the coroner may have to explore further information before a MCCD can be issued.

## Who do you contact after the death?

Because the death is likely to be expected when you or the person you care for/your family member dies, the family/carer are advised to contact the community nursing team when this happens:

### Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm

Community Nursing teams:

North Tyneside: **0191 293 2580**

Northumberland: **via your GP surgery**

### Evenings 5pm to 8.30am, Weekends & Bank Holidays

Community Nursing teams:

North Tyneside and Northumberland

Monday to Sunday 5pm -11pm and all day on weekends and bank holidays: **0191 293 2580**

If you are ringing after 11pm - 8.30am please call switchboard: **0344 811 8111** who will put you through to the district nurse on call.

The community nursing team will visit as soon as they can and will examine the person who has died to verify that death has occurred. Sometimes a doctor has to visit instead to do this examination but the nurses will advise if that is the case.

If the death happens out of hours the community nursing team will contact the police to attend if a referral to the coroner is specified on the 'coroner's checklist'.

If a patient dies Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm the community nursing team will contact the GP surgery to inform them that the patient has died. The police may also attend the place of death in this instance.

## Why the police may need to visit?

The police are attending as the deputy to the coroner. This is completely routine but can be upsetting as they will arrive in a police car.

When the police arrive, they will have to look at the body of the person who has died as this is the procedure for all deaths referred to the coroner. The police will also ask some questions to family / friend / carers to establish some background information before the death occurred.

The police will also need to see any documentation such as the community nursing records being used to support the care being provided. Any medication may be reviewed and could possibly be taken away. If medication is still in the home after the police leave then please contact the community nursing team for advice regarding appropriate safe disposal.

If the death occurs in office hours (Monday to Friday, 9 - 5pm) the doctor will discuss with the coroner and then they make the decision whether to transfer the body to the mortuary or allow the body to be released to the funeral director. If the body needs to be transferred to the mortuary the police may be involved and attend the place of death. The police will organise a nominated funeral director to transport you or the person you care for/family member to the mortuary within a hospital on behalf of the coroner. There will be no cost for this transfer to the mortuary.

## What happens next?

Once you or the person you care for/family member is transferred into the coroner's care your chosen funeral director can then be contacted. The funeral director will then explain the next steps regarding planning your chosen funeral. The funeral director will liaise directly with the coroner's office. The family / friend / carers will be notified once the MCCD is issued by the coroner and sent directly to the registrar. The registrar can then be contacted, which is usually within 5 days of the person dying, to register the death and arrange to obtain the MCCD. The funeral director will usually then finalise any arrangements for the funeral.

## Registrars contact details:

### North Tyneside

Monday – Friday, 9am – 5pm

Telephone number: **0191 643 6164**

Email: [registrars@northtyneside.gov.uk](mailto:registrars@northtyneside.gov.uk)

### Northumberland

Monday – Friday, 9am – 5pm

Telephone Number: **0345 600 6400**

Email: [morpethreg@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:morpethreg@northumberland.gov.uk)

## Coroner's office contact details:

### North Tyneside Coroner's Office:

Opening hours: 8am to 3.30pm Monday to Friday

Telephone: **0191 211 5041**

Email: **[NorthTynesideCoroners@newcastle.gov.uk](mailto:NorthTynesideCoroners@newcastle.gov.uk)**

### Northumberland Coroner's Office:

Opening hours 8am and 4pm Monday to Friday

Telephone: **0191 211 5041**

Email: **[Coroners@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:Coroners@northumberland.gov.uk)**

We hope you have found this leaflet helpful but if you have further questions please don't hesitate to discuss with your doctor, nurse or palliative care team.

## Useful websites

[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

[www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk)

[www.carersuk.org](http://www.carersuk.org)

[www.dyingmatters.org](http://www.dyingmatters.org)

## Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on 03 44 811 8118.

## Other sources of information

### NHS 111

### NHS Choices

[www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx)

### NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

[www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: 0800 032 0202

Text: 07815 500015

Email: [northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk](mailto:northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk)

### Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

General Enquiries 03 44 811 8111

[www.northumbria.nhs.uk](http://www.northumbria.nhs.uk)



PIN 975/V1

Review date: July 2024

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