



LMC UPDATE: From Chief Medical Referee at Markeaton Crematorium Derby Completion of Cremation 4; “part one”, for a deceased to be cremated.

Firstly, can I thank many of my colleagues for their usual ‘good practice’ in completing Cremation Forms 4, and urge you to continue doing this through this time of pressure; especially since the Coronavirus Act 2020 has removed the need for a confirmatory (Form 5) placing more reliance on the information on the Form 4.

For information, before the actual disposal can place the referees at the Crematorium are legally required to complete and sign off the final Cremation Form 10 and since this is now the only “check” in place, the Form 4 must be adequately completed with sufficient information. These are signed off on a daily basis but are usually only received 36 hours before the actual cremation, so timescales are tight. Clearly we are all keen to avoid the scenario where a cremation has to be cancelled at very short notice because the referee has insufficient evidence to sign off the Form 10. The legal requirement here will not be lifted.

Helpful Tips on Completion of Form 4.

- Key to the new approach is that you can satisfy yourself, and the referee, that you can verify the death; especially as this will now often be through a third party
- Although the timescale for having consulted with the patient has been relaxed to 28 days before death, if you have been unable to see the body and state this in box 8 that this “due to risk of infection”. **It is still essential** that you state in either box 8 or in more detail in box 9, how you have verified that a death has taken place.
- If there was a person present, please include their contact details (name, mobile number, relationship with the deceased. At present GPs often do this for relatives or professional carers in section 11; please continue to do this.
- The Cremation Regulations 2008 guidance requires that the evidence offered on the certificate should demonstrate sound clinical grounds for the cause of death given. Please use the large box 9 to provide an adequate history of events, and in the present circumstances this must include a brief summary of any type of clinical contact e.g. 111 call, telephone / video consultation, previous A&E attendance, hot hub contact, etc.
- Please complete the Form 4s legibly and fully and in accordance with good practice
- With this adequate information, the Cremation Referees will apply a clinical common-sense approach during this crisis and these measures will ensure a safe disposal of all deceased whilst meeting legal requirements and importantly avoiding any family being further distressed by a delay to a cremation.
- Please currently also include your mobile phone number in part 3, so any problems can be quickly resolved. This will never be used for any other purpose, and only in relation to the specific Form 4.

Thank you in anticipation of your cooperation and assistance at this exceptional time

Dr Ian Ferrer Chief Medical Referee Markeaton Crematorium Derby



DEATH VERIFICATION:

There is:

- NO requirement for a death to be verified by a doctor.
- NO requirement for the body of the deceased to be examined by a doctor
- NO contractual obligation on GPs to verify death or examine the body. do these

We advise against GPs verifying in person the death of suspected COVID-19 patients.

The Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953 states deaths may be verified by:

- (a) any relative of the deceased person present at the death or in attendance during his last illness ;
- (b) any other relative of the deceased residing or being in the sub-district where the death occurred;
- (c) any person present at the death ;
- (d) the occupier of the house if he knew of the happening of the death;
- (e) any inmate of the house who knew of the happening of the death;
- (f) the person causing the disposal of the body.

DEATH CERTIFICATION:

We have discussed with the Derbyshire Coroner's Office and they are likely to be under unprecedented strain during this pandemic, so post-mortems are being avoided unless absolutely necessary (due to infection control and workload). We agree that every effort should be made to give the most likely cause of death. The Coronavirus Act 2020 and local interpretation has amended procedures as follows:

- You do NOT need to report confirmed COVID-19 deaths to the coroner, but you must report the case to PHE in the usual way.
- For suspected COVID-19 deaths, any doctor may complete a medical certificate of cause of death providing they can give a cause (to the best of their knowledge), although we recommend that you discuss with the Coroner first as the local process is being discussed. Previously, all suspected COVID-19 deaths had to be reported and removed to the mortuary for swabbing but the increasing numbers are prompting a review – hence the advice above.
- **It is acceptable to qualify mention of Covid-19 with words such as 'possibly' or 'probably' indicating the absence of a positive virology test or some ambiguity in clinical presentation, and such qualifiers do not in themselves imply sufficient doubt on the cause of death to require referral to a coroner.**
- Certificate can be issued if **any** doctor has seen the patient (including via videolink) in the preceding 28 days (rather than 14 days which was required previously)
- Certificate can be filled in, signed, scanned and sent to the registrar electronically either by the person collecting it from the practice or direct via the GP. (If sent by GP please keep the original copy for later distribution.

CREMATION FORMS:



The GRO has mandated that (while it is acceptable for consultation before death) videolink is not acceptable for the examination of the deceased after death. We are urgently trying to get definitive guidance as we strongly advise against GPs examining the body of a deceased patient infected with coronavirus or suspected coronavirus in person due to the risk of infection.

If a GP does complete a Cremation Form 4 we would ask that they are completed legibly and as fully as possible. If you have not examined the deceased simply state in the box after Q8 that you have not seen the body and the reason for this e.g. risk of infection. It is then up to the medical referee to decide whether to accept or reject it.

Form Cremation 4 remains unchanged and a PDF version continues to be available. It can be submitted electronically and an electronic signature includes being sent from the secure email account of the person completing the form Cremation 4.