

St Raphael's Hospice Information about Medical Examiner Service

Who are medical examiners and medical examiner officers?

Since 2019, some senior NHS doctors have chosen to receive specialist training and to spend some of their time working as medical examiners. Alongside other specially trained staff, their job is to give independent advice about what caused deaths (except for deaths which have to be reviewed by a coroner).

Medical examiners and their staff (usually called medical examiner officers) offer families and carers of the person who has died an opportunity to raise questions or concerns about the causes of death, or about the care the person received before their death. This will usually be through a telephone call, or sometimes a meeting. They can explain what medical language means, and make it easier to understand. Medical examiners also look at the relevant medical records, and discuss the causes of death with the doctor filling in the official form (its official name is the *Medical Certificate of Cause of Death*).

You can be confident medical examiners and their staff will provide an independent view, as they will only work on deaths of people where they or their staff have not provided care for the patient.

Coroners

When the coroner starts an investigation into a death, the coroner (not the medical examiner) investigates the death independently, though the medical examiner may still provide medical advice to the coroner. Some deaths must be notified to the coroner – you can read about this on the internet (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/notification-of-deaths-regulations-2019-guidance>). You can also get the guidance in other formats by emailing the Ministry of Justice at coroners@justice.gov.uk (this is the part of the government responsible for the guidance).

Why am I being asked if I have any concerns?

A discussion with a medical examiner or their staff provides you with an opportunity to have an open and honest conversation with someone who was not involved in providing care to the person who died, and anything about the care that may be worrying or of concern. It could be as simple as helping you to understand more about the treatment and causes of death or to understand the medical language used, or there may be something about the care which did not feel right or ideal. This is an opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns.

The medical examiner will provide an independent view of causes of death and the care provided. Medical examiners and their staff will discuss your thoughts, questions and concerns, and if they find issues with care that need further investigation, medical examiners will refer these to someone who can do this. As well as answering your questions, this can help the hospice provide better care for other patients and carers in future, for example by uncovering ways in which patient and family care could be improved.

Can I ask the medical examiner to talk to someone else if it's too difficult for me to speak with them?

Yes of course, the medical examiner or their staff may contact you to ask who you would like us to talk to instead, or you can let the medical team know if you would rather have someone else as a first point of contact. The medical examiner or their staff office will usually contact you by phone before you collect the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death, but we can arrange other ways of contacting you if you let us know what is best.

What questions will I be asked?

The medical examiner or their staff will explain what is written on the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death and why, to check if you have any questions or concerns. They will also discuss the medical examiner's review and ask if there are any concerns or questions about the care the person received before their death. This is the best time for you to ask any questions you have about the death and to speak about anything that concerns you.

What if I don't want to speak to the medical examiner or their staff, or I don't want to tell them about my concerns?

We understand this is likely to be a difficult time for many people, speaking to someone is completely your choice. If you are not sure, you can contact the medical examiner or their staff on **0208 296 2493** and ask for more information before deciding if you want to go ahead – they are trained to help people during these difficult family times and will be very understanding.

Medical examiners are independent, so we would like you to speak to them or their staff if possible. They will help to explain things to you and are specially trained to answer your questions. If medical examiners find any potential issues, they will be able to raise these with people responsible for the care of the person who died, or refer the issues to someone who can investigate further. Speaking with the medical examiner and their staff can help improve the care provided by the hospice to other patients and carers in future.

What will happen if something was not right?

The medical examiner and their staff are here to listen to your questions and concerns, provide answers if possible and, if necessary, pass them on to someone who can investigate further. Medical examiners will not investigate further themselves, as they must complete their work within set time limits for the death certification process.

Will funeral plans or release of the body take longer?

Medical examiners make every effort to avoid any delays and work with families and carers of the person who died to meet the legal requirements for registering deaths. Medical examiners and their staff will try to be flexible, for example where relatives need access to the body, or release of the body quickly.

What can I do if I have questions or concerns about the medical examiner process?

If you are not satisfied with the medical examiner's advice, we suggest you discuss this with staff from the medical examiner's office at first. If you are still not satisfied, you can also contact Epsom and St. Helier Hospitals NHS Trust Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 0208 296 2508 or est-tr.PALS@nhs.net. This is the Medical Examiner's office responsible for St Raphael's Hospice.

How can I contact the medical examiner office?

You can contact the medical examiner office here: **0208 296 2493/2491**

Medical Examiner Office
c/o Bereavement Office
Ground Floor B Block,
St. Helier Hospital
Wrythe Lane
Carshalton SM5 1AA
Esth.medex@nhs.net

The medical examiner office is open 9am-4pm Monday – Friday.

If you require assistance accessing services please contact St. Raphael's Hospice in the first instance who will notify the Medical Examiner Office.