Bereavement

Introduction
This booklet is designed to help people who are bereaved when a death occurs in the hospital. It explains procedures such as registering a death and arranging a funeral. The information is not intended to replace personal help and advice, but to offer a practical guide to what has to be done.

Part 1 – Advice on making practical arrangements

At the hospital
When someone dies in hospital, the closest known relatives or next of kin are informed by the ward staff. The medical staff will be available to help and answer any of your immediate questions.

The bereavement office will be given details of the death. The family will be encouraged to take any property at the time and any remaining items belonging to the deceased person will be taken to the office or kept on the ward for relatives to collect. You may be asked to provide identification upon collection of the property. The bereavement officers will arrange for the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) to be completed by the doctor as soon as possible. In certain cases, the death will need to be discussed with the coroner, which may result in a delay in being able to register the death.

Relatives will be advised to telephone the bereavement office at the hospital.

Cheltenham General Hospital
Telephone 0300 422 4753 Monday to Friday, between the hours of 10am to 4pm.

Gloucestershire Royal Hospital
Telephone 0300 422 6742. Monday to Friday between the hours of 10am to 4pm.
If you hear an answer-phone message during working hours you will appreciate that the Bereavement Officer is likely to be
helping another family, so please do leave your contact details and someone will return your call at the earliest opportunity.

Please do not come to the bereavement office until you have spoken to a team member, as the paperwork may not be ready and you will have a wasted journey. You may be asked if the deceased person is to receive a cremation or burial. In the case of a cremation, extra forms are required which the funeral director will arrange to collect from the hospital when authorised. If you have any concerns please do not hesitate to ask the bereavement officer for help and advice.

The Medical Examiner

Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is trialling the government’s proposed reforms of the death certification process in a random proportion of cases. The changes introduce the role of the medical examiner, an independent senior doctor who was not involved in the care of the patient but understands the circumstances surrounding the cause of death. The improvements being trialled are designed to make it easier for you to understand the wording on the medical certificate; this means that you may receive a call from the medical examiner prior to the issue of the medical certificate.

For registering deaths that have occurred anywhere in Gloucestershire Registration District:

You may register at any of the following Registration Offices by appointment only.

- Cheltenham
- Cinderford
- Cirencester
- Gloucester
- Moreton-in-Marsh
- Stroud
- Tewkesbury

For an appointment please call the contact centre on: Telephone 01242 532 455
Or access the registration service website on: www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/registration
If a death has been referred to the coroner, the procedure will be different – please see the section ‘The Coroner’.

All deaths that have not been referred to the coroner must normally be registered within five days of the death by taking the certificate to the register office at your appointment time. If it is difficult for you to travel to a register office within the Gloucestershire Registration District, it is possible for you to register the death in a more convenient office in another county. You would be registering ‘by declaration’ and the information you give to the registrar would be forwarded to the Gloucestershire Registration Service who would then post the documents you require. However, this process may cause delays for you in organising the funeral. For further information speak to the registration service.

When you go to the Registrar you should take the following, where possible:

- The Medical Certificate of Cause of Death from the hospital
- NHS Medical card (if available)

The Registrar will want to know the following information:

- The date and place of death
- The date and place of birth (town and county if born in the UK otherwise the country of birth)
- The deceased’s full name (and any other names by which the deceased has been known, including the maiden name if applicable).
- The deceased's last (usual) address.
- If the deceased was married or in a Registered Civil Partnership, the date of birth of any surviving widow, widower or civil partner
- The deceased's occupation and the name and occupation of the husband/wife or civil partner
- Any details relating to pensions or benefits received.

The Registrar will give you:

- A certificate for burial or cremation. This should be given to the funeral director so that the funeral can take place. (This certificate is free).
A certificate of Registration / Notification for the Department of Social Security (DSS). This is to be sent to the DSS together with any pension / payment books.

- There will be a charge for the death certificate if required at the time of registration
- The Registrar will provide copies of the death certificate if required, for an additional fee (please note that the fee increases significantly if additional copies are requested at a later date).

Copies of the death certificate will be needed for banks, insurance companies, private pensions, premium bonds, share certificates etc.

For cremation, additional forms are required but the funeral director will arrange to collect these from the hospital.

**New ‘Tell us Once’ Service**

The Gloucestershire Registration Service is working with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to simplify the process of notifying other government departments and local authority services on your behalf. Ideally, you will bring to your appointment the deceased person’s National Insurance number, passport, driving licence, blue badge and bus pass, where applicable.

**The Coroner**

Occasionally, the doctor will need to discuss a death with the coroner but no further investigation is required. To confirm their intent, the coroner will issue a letter to the registrar confirming the cause of death and allowing the registration process to take place; this may cause a days delay in the registration but you will be advised at the time of booking your appointment.

**Coroner’s Post Mortems**

If the death has been reported to the coroner, you should ignore the section on registering a death as there will not be any paperwork to collect from the bereavement office. You will be informed by the coroner’s office when they have sent paperwork to the registration office so that you can make an appointment to register the death.

For deaths that occur in Gloucestershire Royal Hospital, please telephone: 01452 305 661
For deaths that occur in Cheltenham General Hospital, please telephone: 01452 305 661
Advise your funeral director as soon as possible that the death has been reported to the coroner.

**A post mortem examination may be carried out for the following reasons:**

- Where the medical cause of death is unknown and the hospital staff or deceased’s doctor cannot sign a death certificate
- When the death was sudden and unexpected or considered potentially unnatural circumstances
- When the death might be due to an industrial injury or from exposure to industrial diseases, accident, violence, neglect, etc
- When the death occurred during an operation or before full recovery from the effects of an anaesthetic

The coroner may order a post mortem where deaths occur in any of the above circumstances. This can be done without the authorisation of the next of kin, which is not required in cases referred to the coroner. If, as a result of the post mortem, the death is confirmed as being due to an unnatural cause, the coroner is obliged by law to hold an inquest.

If a death becomes the subject of an inquest, full details of the procedures to be followed will be provided to the next of kin by the coroner’s office as soon as practical after the cause of death is confirmed by the post mortem.

**Inquest**

An inquest is a public hearing which takes evidence relating to who the deceased person was, where, when and how he/she came by his/her death. The coroner’s officers will explain who can ask questions of the witnesses called by the coroner. The inquest does not answer questions of compensation or blame, it simply establishes the facts. In some cases (especially where accidents have happened) it may be best to seek legal advice well before the hearing.

When an inquest is held the death cannot be registered until the conclusion, but the coroner may give your funeral director an order
for burial or certificate for cremation so that the funeral can take place and can issue an interim death certificate which will normally enable all legal formalities relating to a death to be attended to. The coroner will send to the registrar a ‘certificate after inquest’ stating the cause of death, which will enable the death to be registered, without an informant.

Hospital Post Mortem

If the hospital doctor issuing the medical certificate of death requests a hospital post mortem, the doctor will discuss this with you. There are a variety of reasons the doctor may feel the examination is beneficial, for example, to provide clinicians and relatives more insight into rare conditions. You have the right to refuse a hospital post mortem.

If you decide to grant permission for a hospital post mortem to be carried out, you will be asked to complete and sign a consent form to allow a full or limited examination to be done with your approval.

A hospital post mortem does not necessarily hold up funeral arrangements and the registration of the death can still take place in the normal way.

Organ and Tissue Retention associated with post mortems

When a post mortem examination takes place, small tissue or body fluids samples (about the same quantities that a doctor may remove from a living patient for tests) will usually be retained and used for further examination to clarify or confirm the cause of death.

When it is necessary to retain larger sections of tissue or whole organs, the next-of-kin will be told what has been retained and why, where it is going to be sent and what the options are for eventual disposal.

Donation of Organs

If it is the wish of the deceased person or their next of kin to donate organs for transplantation, it is important to make your wishes known as soon as possible to a member of the nursing or medical staff.
Organs can only be removed if the deceased had given consent e.g. by registering with the NHS organ donation register and if the legal next of kin also consents. This may not be possible if the Coroner is involved.

**Visiting the Deceased**

Visiting facilities are available in a viewing area attached to the mortuary; please contact your bereavement office to arrange an appointment if required. There are certain restrictions with the scheduled time of appointments and with numbers/family members who can attend, so you may wish to wait until the deceased is taken into the care of the funeral home for greater flexibility.

**The Funeral**

It is advisable to establish if there has been a will made by the deceased as this may include specific wishes about the funeral arrangements. Most funerals are arranged by a firm of funeral directors of your choice and can be expensive. If you arrange a funeral, you are responsible for paying the bill, so it is advisable to check where the money will come from. The costs are usually met by the assets of the deceased person.

The National Association of Funeral Directors have a code of practice and members of the association will give you an estimate of the cost of the funeral in advance. It may be possible to pay by instalments.

If relatives cannot be traced, the hospital where the death occurred may arrange and pay for a simple burial or cremation.

A list of local funeral directors for your area can be found in your local telephone directory or ask the bereavement office for a list.

You may be able to get a payment from the social fund to help pay for the funeral if you are claiming any of the following:

- Income Support
- Family Credit
- Housing Benefit
- Council Tax Benefit
Ask at your local Social Security office about payments from the social fund. The telephone number and address will be in the telephone book under Social Security or Health and Social Security.

**Probate**

Before the deceased’s estate (belongings, money and property) can be divided between the people entitled to share it, a grant of probate, or letters of administration must be obtained. In all cases where the estate is more than £5,000, advice can be obtained from:

A Solicitor

or

The Probate Registry Office
2nd Floor
Combined Court Building
Kimbrose Way
Glos
GL1 2DG
Tel: 01452 834966

Do not, in the meantime, sell any of the deceased’s property. If there is a will, any of the executors can apply for probate. If there is no will, application should be made by the closest relative in the following order of priority:

- Widow or Widower
- Children
- Parent
- Brother or Sister

**To apply you will need:-**

- The death certificate
- Any will or other wishes of the deceased
- Full details of the estate – everything owed or due to the deceased when he/she died, any liabilities or debts

After a grant has been made, the personal representative of the deceased should settle any debts, obtain any life insurance due, transfer the ownership of any house, shares or other property of the deceased and so on.
**Solicitor**
If you are employing a solicitor, you are entitled to pay him/her out of the deceased estate. The solicitor will give you help and advice, and can obtain probate or letter of administration for you.

**Donations**
If you wish to make donations to the hospital in lieu of flowers, these should be taken or sent to the general office of the relevant hospital. Cheques should be made payable to Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust; please include a note advising to which area you wish money to be donated, details of the deceased and your name and address for acknowledgement. If you have any queries, please telephone the hospital.

**Part 2 – Coping with feelings when someone dies**
Bereavement is something which all people will experience at some time in their lives. Whether someone has been ill for some time or the death is very sudden and unexpected, the news that a person has died will come as a shock.

While no two people experience grief in the same way, the feelings described below are the most common reactions. People come from a variety of cultural, social and religious backgrounds so have different ways of mourning and supporting each other but several experiences in grief are common to everyone. The feelings described below are just a sample of many that can occur:

**Expressing your grief**
In the early months of grief, you will probably feel moments of sharp intense grief interspersed with a more constant sense of dull loss. You may be feeling very lost in the world and simple daily chores might involve painful recollections of tasks previously done together. Grief is such an exhausting variety of emotions that can leave you feeling tired much of the time, but equally you can have trouble sleeping.

**Shock**
This is a natural reaction. You may feel numb and unable to believe what has happened, become quiet and withdrawn while some people can become agitated and anxious. Whatever you are feeling, try to bring it to the surface; don’t put on a brave face.
Anger
You may feel angry at the unfairness of the death; that medical services could have done more or reacted differently. A part of you may be feeling anger towards the person who has died. Try to avoid bottling up your feelings by talking about them to someone you trust and who is a good listener.

Anxiety
It is common to feel anxious in the early stages of grief when you have to face an unclear and unknown future. This may manifest itself in persistent physical sensations such as pounding heart beat, muscle tension and increased perspiration. It may be helpful to learn some relaxation techniques to help you with your anxiety.

Depression
Acute anxiety and anger often gradually give way to more constant feelings of depression and apathy. This happens as you finally come to realise at a deeper level that your loved one will never return. Unfortunately, these feelings of hopelessness often coincide with a time when all immediate friends and family who offered support at the funeral seem to have backed away. Friends are often embarrassed at not knowing what to say and sometimes without realising it themselves, stay away. You may often worry that you will become a burden on others and consequently avoid contacting people. Try to remember that if a friend had turned to you for support in their grief, perhaps you should feel honoured to have been asked for help.

Guilt
If you have been caring for your relative for a long time before they died, your feelings of loss may be complicated by some milder feelings of relief that both you and the deceased are released from a long painful illness. This is quite understandable and does not make you a bad person for feeling it. If the death was more sudden, it may have left you feeling guilty about things left unsaid. Perhaps you didn’t say how much you cared or you did not say you were sorry about things you may have said or done; maybe you didn’t have a chance to say goodbye. All such concerns are perfectly natural.

Talking to children about death
Adults may often feel the need to protect children from the facts of death, thinking children will not understand or that they will be too
upset. However, we can often underestimate a child’s resources and ability to cope. Children often find it harder to cope if they are not told what is happening because they will often make up a story about what has happened and this can often be more frightening than the truth. When children are given information in a way they can understand they can be remarkably strong. Even very young children will want to know what happened, how, why and what happens next.

It is often asked if children should attend funerals. It can sometimes be easier to make that decision by asking them what they would like to do. As most children will not have had to make this decision before it can be helpful to explain why we hold funerals, what happens during them and then ask if they would like to attend.

Like adults, children learn to cope when someone important in their lives dies. By encouraging them to ask questions we can help them to understand the feelings they have after a death.

'Winston's Wish' is a Gloucestershire service for children who have had a parent or sibling die. It offers specialist help to families both prior to and following a death. The service is run by a small group of professionals and offers residential weekends, groups and help on an individual basis.

**Support Organisations**

**Dept of Work & Pensions (DWP) Bereavement Benefits Service**
New benefit applications and pension queries
Tel: 08456 060 265
Ongoing bereavement-benefit enquiries
Tel: 08456 088 601

**Benefits Enquiry Line**
National DWP helpline
Tel: 0800 882200

**Gloucestershire Social Services – Adult Helpdesk all enquiries**
Tel: 01452 426 868

**Social Care Offices within the Hospitals**
Gloucestershire Royal Hospital
Tel: 0300 422 6582
Cheltenham General Hospital
Tel: 0300 422 3052
Citizens Advice Bureau
Stroud
Tel: 01453 759 954
Cinderford
Tel: 08444 111 444
Gloucester
Tel: 01452 527 202
Cheltenham
Tel: 01242 522 491
Tewkesbury
Tel: 01242 522 491
Cirencester
Tel: 01285 652 908
NB Chelt, Tewks and Ciren CABx are all co-ordinated by Cheltenham

Healthwatch (in place of GUIDE)
Health and social care information and support for Gloucestershire
Tel: 08000 151 548
healthwatchgloucestershire.co.uk

Community Specialist Palliative Care Team
For families previously known to the service
Tel: 0300 422 5370

Palliative Care Teams
For families previously known to the service
Gloucestershire Royal Hospital
Tel: 0300 422 5179
Cheltenham General Hospital
Tel: 0300 422 3447

Age UK Gloucestershire
Bleak House,
26 Station Road, Gloucester,
GL1 1EW
Tel: 01452 422 660
enquiries@ageukgloucestershire.org.uk
Compassionate Friends
Support for bereaved parents and siblings of any age
National helpline: Tel: 08451 232 304
www.tcf.org.uk
info@tcf.org.uk

CRUSE Bereavement Counselling
Lower Ground Floor,
31 St George’s Road,
Cheltenham,
GL50 3DU
gloucestershire@cruse.org.uk
www.cruse.org.uk
Tel: 01242 252 518
National Helpline
Tel: 08444 779 400

National Association of Funeral Directors
Tel: 01217 111 343

Samaritans
Gloucester
Tel: 01452 306 333
Cheltenham
Tel: 01242 515 777
National Helpline
Tel: 08457 909 090
www.samaritans.org.uk

Study of Sudden Infant Deaths (SIDs) – South West
Counselling and support for families
National helpline
Tel: 08088 026 868
South-West Co-ordinator
Tel: 01872 863 114
Stillbirth & Neonatal Death Society (SANDS)
National helpline
Tel: 020 7436 5881
Gloucestershire Group contacts
Tel: 07805 950 547 / 07805 950 628
www.uk-sands.org
info@glostershiresands.org

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)
Gloucestershire group
Tel: 01452 371 945
National Helpline
Tel: 08445 616 855

Winston’s Wish
Support for bereaved children
St James House,
St James Square,
Cheltenham
GL50 3PR
Helpline
Tel: 08452 030 405
General enquiries
Tel: 01242 515 157
www.winstonswish.org.uk
info@winstonswish.org.uk

Gloucestershire Youthline (support for young people 13 – 19yrs)
Tel/Text: 08000 961 425

TIC+ (Teens in Crisis)
Advice, support and counselling for teenagers
Tel: 01594 546 117

_Clergy, priests, rabbis and other religious officials can be contacted through the appropriate religious organisation._