

9th April 2020

Information for Bereaved Families

Please accept our heartfelt condolences at this sad time of loss. We understand the distress that the death of a loved one causes, and want to provide you with clear advice on what will happen next, and what you can expect.

When someone died in hospital previously, and relatives came to pay their last respects, they would have been given a copy of the booklet “What to Do after a Death” which explained the usual procedure following a death. Because of the current situation with the Coronavirus pandemic, relatives are not allowed to attend the hospital, and therefore we are currently unable to give you this helpful information leaflet. Brief information can be found at:

<https://www.bedfordshirehospitals.nhs.uk/patients-visitors/information-for-patients-visitors-luton-and-dunstable-university-hospital/support-and-assistance/bereavement-service>

A number of elements of the former process have recently changed because of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, and this letter sets out these changes to help you navigate the process.

Where infection with Coronavirus is confirmed by positive test results, Covid-19 will appear on the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD). It can be listed as a direct cause of death (Cause 1A, 1B or 1C), or it can be present, but not directly causing the death (Cause 2). If Covid-19 is not mentioned, your loved one either tested negative, or were not felt to have been showing any symptoms of signs of infection when they died, and were therefore not tested.

If the death of your loved one could have been due to Coronavirus infection, but test results are still not available, doctors at Bedford and Luton & Dunstable Hospitals may have to wait for the results of the Covid-19 test before issuing the MCCD. Test results can be over 48 hrs before they are made available to us, and we would ask you to bear with us while we get this information. The Bereavement Office will make contact with the nominated next of kin following the death, and will contact them again as soon as the cause of death has been established and the necessary paperwork has been completed. This will include the result of their Covid-19 test where one has been sent.

In certain circumstances, we may refer the death to the Coroner for further advice, our Bereavement Services will discuss this with you. In these circumstances, we ask you **not** to phone the Bereavement Service subsequently for the Covid-19 test results because we will be unable to give them to you.

With immediate effect, for all deaths, whether associated with Coronavirus infection or not, the Bereavement Office will scan the Medical Certificate of the Cause of Death directly to the Superintendent Registrar, who will then issue the “Green Form”. If you have told the Bereavement Office the name of your nominated funeral director, this form will be emailed to them directly, allowing them to collect the body from the Hospital. You will subsequently be contacted by the

Registrar's Office by telephone to complete the formalities required to register the death. Previously, you would have been required to attend the Registry Office in person to register the death, but this is now being done by telephone to minimise the risk of Registry staff being exposed to relatives who may have been in close contact with the deceased prior to their death.

We are expecting a significant increase in the number of deaths over the coming weeks, and it is inevitable that we will reach a point very soon where our mortuary will be full. Viewings of the deceased are now not permitted because of the risk of exposure of both staff and bereaved relatives to infection during the viewing process. Arrangements are being made for an additional mortuary facility, based at RAF Henlow, for temporary storage. Mortuary facilities here are being managed and regulated to HTA standards.

We would ask you to contact your chosen funeral director as soon as possible so that they can arrange to collect the body of your loved one from the hospital mortuary. If they cannot do this within a few days, it is likely that the body will need to be moved to the mortuary at RAF Henlow, and will then need to be retrieved from there by the funeral director prior to the funeral. We can assure you that this additional facility will be run to the same standard as that at the hospital, and all moves will be carried out with respect and dignity, and your loved one will remain there until the funeral director is ready for them.

Thank you for your co-operation and understanding at this difficult time. We apologise that you may find some of this information upsetting, but we believe that you should be fully informed of the recent changes to our usual processes.

If you have any questions, or require any assistance with the process of death registration, please contact the Bereavement Officers at the hospital where your loved one passed.

Bedford Hospital Bereavement Services 01234 792163

Luton & Dunstable Bereavement Services 01582 497344