



# When someone dies: a practical guide for family and friends

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## **Key contact details for services**

### **Deaths which occur at Barnet Hospital or Chase Farm Hospital sites**

#### **Bereavement office**

Tel: 0208 216 4819.

Email: [rf-tr.bh-bereavementoffice@nhs.net](mailto:rf-tr.bh-bereavementoffice@nhs.net).

Open: Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm (closed 12.30pm to 1.30pm daily).

#### **Chaplaincy**

Tel: 020 8216 4355, extension 64355.

#### **Medical examiner's office**

Tel: 020 8216 4879.

Email: [rf-tr.bhmeo@nhs.net](mailto:rf-tr.bhmeo@nhs.net).

Open: Monday to Friday, 8am to 4pm.

#### **Mortuary**

Tel: 020 8216 4719.

Monday to Friday 9am - 15:30 (closed 12.30pm to 1.30pm daily)

#### **Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)**

Tel: 020 8216 4924

Email: [bcfpals@nhs.net](mailto:bcfpals@nhs.net)

Open: Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

#### **Barnet coroner**

Email: [admin.beh@hmc-northlondon.co.uk](mailto:admin.beh@hmc-northlondon.co.uk).

#### **Barnet register office**

Tel: 020 359 6400.

### **Deaths which occur at Royal Free Hospital site**

#### **Bereavement office**

Tel: 0207 830 2863 / [rf-tr.rf-bereavementoffice@nhs.net](mailto:rf-tr.rf-bereavementoffice@nhs.net)

Open: Monday to Friday, 9am to 4pm (closed 12.30pm to 1.30pm daily).

#### **Chaplaincy**

Tel: 0207 830 2742.

#### **Medical examiner's office**

Tel: 020 7472 6393, extension 33916 or 37150).

Email: [rf-tr.rfmeo@nhs.net](mailto:rf-tr.rfmeo@nhs.net).

Open: Monday to Friday, 8am to 4pm.

#### **Mortuary**

Tel: 0207 830 2373.

Open: Monday to Friday 9am to 3.30 (closed 12.30pm to 1.30pm daily).

**Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

Tel: 0207 472 6446 or 0207 830 2577

Email: [rf.pals@nhs.net](mailto:rf.pals@nhs.net).

Open: Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

**St Pancras coroner**

Tel: 0207 974 4545

Email: [coroner.stpancras@camden.gov.uk](mailto:coroner.stpancras@camden.gov.uk).

**Camden register office**

Tel: 0207 974 4444

Website: [www.camden.gov.uk/deaths-in-camden](http://www.camden.gov.uk/deaths-in-camden).

## Information for family and friends

This booklet answers common questions about what happens when someone dies. If you would like further information, or have any worries, please do not hesitate to ask the bereavement service.

### What do I need to do first?

Please telephone the bereavement service after 9am the next working day after someone has died, and our dedicated team will discuss how we can best help you through this difficult time.

To allow you time to process things at your own pace, we will only get in touch when there is an update to share throughout the process.

So that we can make necessary preparations for you, please do not come directly to the bereavement office at the hospital without contacting us by telephone first.

If the person who has died had previously arranged to become an organ donor, please make staff on the ward aware.

### Chaplaincy-spiritual care support

The chaplaincy-spiritual care team is there to support anyone of any faith, belief or philosophy of life. It is a multi-faith team who offer spiritual, religious and pastoral care to patients, staff, and visitors. The team offers non-judgemental, compassionate support.

#### Chaplaincy-spiritual care team

##### Barnet Hospital

Tel: 020 8216 4355, extension 64355.

##### Chase Farm Hospital

Tel: 020 8375 1078, extension 51078.

##### Royal Free Hospital

Tel: 020 7830 2742, extension 33096.

### What happens to the person who has died?

After someone dies, they can stay on the ward for a short period of time to allow for visitors to arrive and spend some time with them. After this time, the person who has died will stay in the mortuary at either Barnet Hospital or the Royal Free Hospital.

Our compassionate team will keep them safe and ensure they are treated with dignity and respect until they are transferred into the care of your funeral director.

For people who have died at Chase Farm Hospital, this care will be provided by the team at Barnet Hospital.

Please note that all deaths must be scrutinised, or reviewed, by a medical examiner and arrangements for a funeral. The release of the person who has died from the hospital will not be able to proceed until this process is complete.

### **When someone dies outside normal working hours**

For safety reasons it is not possible to accompany the person who has died to the mortuary and viewings will only be possible during mortuary opening hours. We understand that in exceptional circumstances burial may need to be arranged for the person who died at the first possible opportunity and every effort will be made to support this.

### **Can I visit the person who has died at the mortuary?**

Visits in the mortuary are by appointment only and we are unable to facilitate unscheduled visits. The visiting suites are open from 10am to 12pm and 2pm to 3pm, Monday to Friday only. Appointments last 30 minutes. Visits cannot be accommodated outside of these times.

To book a visiting appointment, please telephone:

- Barnet Hospital mortuary: 020 8216 4716
- Royal Free Hospital mortuary: 020 7830 2373

Visitors will be required to complete a short form and will need to give the following details about the deceased:

- Full name
- Date of birth
- Date of death

If you cannot physically attend the mortuary (for example, if you live abroad or have access needs) but still would like to see your loved one, we can offer virtual visits. Please contact the mortuary team for more information.

## **What is the process after someone has died at the hospital?**

When someone dies at the hospital, their death is reviewed by a medical examiner. This review can take up to 72 hours (working days only). When the review is complete, the medical examiner office will contact you to discuss the cause of death and next steps.

Depending on the circumstances of the death, there are two possible outcomes of the review:

### **1. Medical certificate of cause of death (MCCD) is written**

If the cause of death can be agreed by the medical examiner and the doctors who treated the person who has died, a MCCD is written. A medical examiner officer will make contact to explain the cause of death to you before passing the certificate to the bereavement office.

This is then sent to the local register office, allowing registration to take place.

The bereavement office will confirm the MCCD has been sent and arrange a release form to be issued (for use by the funeral director to collect the person who has died from our care when arrangements have been made).

### **1. The coroner is notified of the death**

Under some circumstances, the hospital is legally required to notify a death to His Majesty's Coroner who may decide to carry out their own independent investigation.

In some cases, the coroner can give permission for the MCCD to be issued by the hospital. In other cases, the coroner will need to investigate further, and alternative paperwork will be issued by the coroner.

For more information, please see the section titled 'If the coroner is involved'.

## **Medical examiners**

Medical examiners are senior doctors who were not involved in the treatment of the person who has died. Their role is to provide an independent review of the cause of death.

Medical examiners and their staff (medical examiner officers) offer families and carers of the person who died an opportunity to ask questions or raise 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 the medical language means and make it easier to understand what happened. Medical examiners also look at relevant medical records and discuss the causes of death with the doctor who is completing the MCCD.

You can be confident medical examiners and medical examiner officers will provide an independent view. The medical examiner will never examine the cause of death of a person for whom they provided care for.

## **Medical examiner offices contact details**

### **Barnet Hospital**

Open: Monday to Friday, 8am to 4pm.

Tel: 0208 216 4744

Email: [rf-tr.bhmeo@nhs.net](mailto:rf-tr.bhmeo@nhs.net)

### **Royal Free Hospital**

Open: Monday to Friday, 8am to 4pm.

Tel: 0207 472 6393

Email: [rf-tr.rfmeo@nhs.net](mailto:rf-tr.rfmeo@nhs.net)

### **Weekend service**

Open: Saturday and Sunday, 8.30 to 11.30am.

This service is for same day burials, child death and organ donation.

Tel: 020 7472 6393

Email: [rf-tr.bhmeo@nhs.net](mailto:rf-tr.bhmeo@nhs.net)

### **Why am I being asked if I have any questions about the cause of death?**

You are being asked if you would like to have a conversation with the medical examiner or a medical examiner officer about anything that may be worrying you about how the person who died was cared for.

You may simply want to better understand why the person died, including by having medical terminology explained, or you may want to raise something about the care which did not feel right or ideal. This is your opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns.

Medical examiners and medical examiner officers will discuss your feedback, questions and concerns. If they consider any issues with care that need further investigation, they will refer these to someone who can investigate this.

As well as answering your questions, talking to a medical examiner helps the NHS provide better care for other patients and carers in future; for example, by identifying ways in which patient and family care could be improved.



## Registering a death

Before a death can be registered, the cause of death must first be established and a MCCD issued. The bereavement office will then send an electronic copy of the MCCD to the register office for the borough where the person died.

We will notify you of when the MCCD has been sent to the registrars so that you can make an appointment for a face-to-face appointment at the register office, to register the death.

### Deaths at Barnet Hospital

Barnet Register Office  
Hendon Town Hall  
The Burroughs  
London  
NW4 4BG

Tel: 020 359 6400.

Website: [www.barnet.gov.uk/births-deaths-and-marriages/deaths/register-death](http://www.barnet.gov.uk/births-deaths-and-marriages/deaths/register-death).

### For deaths at the Royal Free Hospital

Camden Register Office  
Camden Town Hall  
Judd Street  
London  
WC1H 9JE

Tel: 020 7974 4444.

Website: [www.camden.gov.uk/deaths-in-camden](http://www.camden.gov.uk/deaths-in-camden).

**Please note:** An appointment to register a death should not be made until the MCCD has been issued.

To register a death, you will need the following information about the person who has died:

- Full name (and any previous names)
- Usual address
- Date and place of birth and death
- Occupation
- Date of birth and occupation of any surviving spouse or civil partner

The registrar will issue:

- A certified copy of the death certificate. There is a fee for each copy of the death certificate, you may wish to purchase several copies to use to notify different agencies – for details please see the website of the appropriate register office.
- A certificate for burial or cremation in England and Wales (commonly known as the 'green form' or 'green certificate'). Please pass this on to your chosen Funeral Director. A burial or cremation cannot take place without this form. This form is not issued if the deceased will be repatriated.
- Information about the 'Tell Us Once' service. This service allows you to inform multiple government agencies of the death through a single online government form.

## **If the coroner is involved**

In some cases, the MCCD cannot be issued, and the death must be notified by the medical team to HMC.

There are very strict legal rules about when a death must be notified to the coroner and a referral to the coroner cannot be disputed. Some reasons why a referral would need to be made include:

- when someone died during or very soon after surgery
- if the death was sudden or unexpected
- if the cause of death cannot be determined
- if there was trauma or an injury preceding the death, e.g., a hip fracture.

Coroners are independent from the hospital and investigate deaths that are reported to them. During their investigation they may need to undertake a post-mortem examination.

A post-mortem examination, or autopsy, is an examination of the person who has died after death carried out by pathologists. These are doctors who are highly trained and specialise in the diagnosis of disease and the identification of the cause of death, which helps us understand why the person has died. In some cases, a post-mortem can be performed using specialist imaging.

The coroner may seek further information from other professionals by opening an inquest. This process cannot be negotiated or hindered by anyone.

Updates will be provided through the coroner's office, who will be in contact to explain the process and provide information and support. The hospital will not receive updates before the key contact for the person who has died and are unable to make the process faster.

Once the coroner's involvement is complete it will be possible to register the death. In cases where an MCCD could not be issued alternative paperwork will be provided by the coroner to allow registration to take place.

The documents provided by the registrar will be the same as those explained in 'Registering a death'.

## **Planning a funeral**

Please let the bereavement office know whether the funeral will be a burial, cremation, or repatriation, where the person who died is having their funeral in their own country, as soon as you are aware. This will allow the necessary paperwork to be completed as soon as possible.

The following websites may be of use during the funeral planning process:

Funeral Choice

[www.yourfuneralchoice.com](http://www.yourfuneralchoice.com).

National Association of Funeral Directors

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

National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors  
<https://saif.org.uk>

Government assistance with funeral costs (funeral expenses payment, where eligibility rules apply)  
[www.gov.uk/funeral-payments](http://www.gov.uk/funeral-payments)

### **What happens if the funeral is taking place in a different country?**

If a repatriation is planned where the funeral will take place in the country of the person who has died, please inform the hospital bereavement office, as well as the registrars during your appointment to register the death, as both services will need to issue appropriate paperwork to allow this to take place.

HMC will also need to issue an Out of England Order, which may take several days. This will be arranged by your funeral director.

### **How do I collect any property and valuables?**

After a death, non-valuable items such as clothing can be collected from the ward, while valuable items such as money and jewellery can be collected from the cashier's office. Small items of jewellery may remain with the deceased and can be collected from the funeral director.

The release of items by the cashier's office is at their discretion and will require a form of photographic identification.

The bereavement office does not handle personal effects – please contact either the ward or the cashier's office.

Cashier's offices can be found in the following locations:

- Royal Free London, Lower Ground Floor (9am to 5pm on Monday to Friday).  
Tel. 020 7794 0500, extensions 34450, 33426, and 34449.
- Barnet Hospital, third Floor (9am to 3pm on Monday to Friday).  
Tel: 020 8216 4295.
- Chase Farm Hospital, Ground Floor (9am to 5pm on Monday to Friday)  
Tel: 020 8375 1261.

### **Body donation to medical science**

If the person who has died had planned to be a body donor, please contact the London Anatomy Office to discuss next steps on tel:020 7848 8042 or by email: [lao@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:lao@kcl.ac.uk).

Alternatively, please let the bereavement team aware as soon as possible. Visit their website for further information:

[www.kcl.ac.uk/research/london-anatomy-office](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/london-anatomy-office).

## Feedback

We are committed to providing an effective, individualised, compassionate, and sensitive service. We appreciate feedback, which can be given through the avenues described below.

As part of the National Audit of Care at the End of Life you may be invited to give feedback about your experience of care through a survey. This survey is independent from the hospital, however anonymised feedback is shared with the trust.

If you feel it would be helpful to speak with the lead clinician who cared for the person who has died to understand the care, they received this can be arranged by contacting the ward.

If you have any feedback regarding care received, please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS):

### Barnet Hospital PALS

Open: Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

Email: [bcfpals@nhs.net](mailto:bcfpals@nhs.net).

Tel: 020 8216 4924

### Chase Farm Hospital PALS

Open: Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm.

Email: [rf-tr.cfhpals@nhs.net](mailto:rf-tr.cfhpals@nhs.net).

Tel: 020 8375 1328.

### Royal Free Hospital PALS

Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

Email: [rf.pals@nhs.net](mailto:rf.pals@nhs.net).

Tel: 020 7472 6446, or 020 7830 2577.

PALS webpage: [www.royalfree.nhs.uk/contact-us/patient-advice-and-liaison-service-pals](http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/contact-us/patient-advice-and-liaison-service-pals).

If the PALS team are unable to resolve your concerns, or you would prefer to make a formal complaint with the trust, please contact our complaints team:

### Barnet Hospital complaints

Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

Email: [rf-tr.bcfcomplaints@nhs.net](mailto:rf-tr.bcfcomplaints@nhs.net)

Tel: 020 8216 4286

Write to:

Barnet Hospital  
Complaints Department  
Thames House  
Wellhouse Lane  
Barnet  
EN5 3DJ

### **Chase Farm Hospital complaints**

Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

Email: [rf-tr.cfhcomplaints@nhs.net](mailto:rf-tr.cfhcomplaints@nhs.net)

Phone: 0208 375 1328

Write to:

Chase Farm Hospital

Patient Experience Team

The Ridgeway

Enfield

Middlesex

EN2 8JL

### **Royal Free Hospital complaints**

Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

Email: [rf.complaints@nhs.net](mailto:rf.complaints@nhs.net)

Phone: 0208 375 1328

Write to:

Royal Free Hospital

Complaints Department

Executive Offices

Pond Street

London

NW3 2QG

An online complaints form can be accessed at:

[www.royalfree.nhs.uk/contact-us/patient-advice-and-liaison-service-pals/compliments-suggestions-and-concerns/complaints/complaints-form](http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/contact-us/patient-advice-and-liaison-service-pals/compliments-suggestions-and-concerns/complaints/complaints-form).

For specific feedback regarding bereavement, medical examiner and mortuary services please contact the service delivery manager: 07929 791 163.

### **How can I apply for medical record access?**

To apply for access to health records, an online form is available at:

[www.royalfree.nhs.uk/contact-us/freedom-information-act-requests/accessing-your-health-records](http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/contact-us/freedom-information-act-requests/accessing-your-health-records).

Access is subject to conditions.

Contact the access team:

Tel: 020 7412 1625.

Email: [rf-tr.accessrequests@nhs.net](mailto:rf-tr.accessrequests@nhs.net).

## **Useful contacts**

### **Age UK**

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

Offers support for older people.

Tel: 0800 055 6112.

### **Asian family counselling service**

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

Counselling for the south Asian community.

Tel: 020 8574 0912 (London) or 0121 454 1130 (Birmingham).

### **Chai cancer care**

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

Support for any member of the Jewish community affected by cancer.

Tel: 0808 808 4567.

### **The compassionate friends**

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

Supporting bereaved parents and their families.

Tel: 0345 123 2304.

Email: [helpline@tcf.org.uk](mailto:helpline@tcf.org.uk).

### **Cruse bereavement support**

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

Trained volunteers who can offer emotional and practical support.

Tel: 0808 808 1677.

### **Jewish bereavement counselling service**

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

Bereavement counselling for the Jewish community.

Tel: 0208 951 3881.

Email: [enquiries@jbcs.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@jbcs.org.uk).

### **Samaritans**

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

24 Hour emotional support available to anyone.

Tel: 116 123.

### **Switchboard**

[www.switchboard.lgbt](http://www.switchboard.lgbt).

National LGBTQIA+ Support Line.

Tel: 0800 0119 100.

**Dedicated support for bereaved children**  
**Child bereavement UK**

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

Support for children who are grieving, or for those who are grieving a child.

Tel: 0800 02 888 40

**Child death helpline**

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

Support for those affected by the death of a child.

Tel: 0800 282 986.

**Childline**

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

Support for all children.

Tel: 0800 1111.

**Winston's Wish**

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

Support for grieving children, teenagers, and young adults up to the age of 25.

Tel: 08088 020 021.

Email: [ask@winstonswish.org](mailto:ask@winstonswish.org).

**How you can help patients and staff by supporting the Royal Free Charity**



The Royal Free Charity works in partnership with the Royal Free London to support both hospital patients and staff. Kind donations enable investment in medical research and provide additional equipment to improve waiting times and diagnosis, as well as funding services which enhance patients' experience of care.

You may have seen purple-shirted volunteers who provide companionship to patients and administrative support to staff, or the complementary therapy service who provide relief from the uncomfortable side effects of treatment. All of this is only possible with the help of committed supporters.

Patients, friends and families often wish to support the Royal Free Charity as a way of remembering a loved one or saying thank you. Your donation would help deliver a wide range of support services for staff and patients across the Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust. There are lots of ways to donate:

- Telephone: call 020 7317 7772. The charity's friendly fundraising team are available to help process donations over the phone, and to answer any questions you have about the charity.
- Cheque: Cheques should be made payable to the Royal Free Charity. Please include a note with your details and who the gift is in memory of and send to FREEPOST Royal Free Charity. You do not need to add the charity's address.  
Online: visit [www.royalfreecharity.org/donate](http://www.royalfreecharity.org/donate).

If you have any questions, would like to know more about the organisation's work or would like help setting up an online page in memory of a loved one, please contact the fundraising team on 020 7317 7772 or email [fundraising@royalfreecharity.org](mailto:fundraising@royalfreecharity.org). Thank you for your support.

### **More information**

For more information about the bereavement service at the Royal Free London, please visit our website: [www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/bereavement](http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/bereavement).

### **Your feedback**

If you have any feedback on this leaflet or for a list of references for it, please email: [rf-tr.communications@nhs.net](mailto:rf-tr.communications@nhs.net)

### **Alternative formats**

This leaflet is also available in large print. If you need this leaflet in another format – for example Braille, a language other than English or audio – please speak to a member of staff.

The Royal Free London does not endorse companies, services, or products advertised in this booklet.

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