

# National Medical Examiner update

February 2021

## Welcome

I am delighted the government published the White Paper earlier this month, including measures to put medical examiners on a statutory footing. The Royal College of Pathologists also shared their success with the 1000<sup>th</sup> medical examiner trained. You can read more about these important milestones below.

In my October 2020 bulletin, I mentioned my plan to publish a series of brief good practice papers for medical examiners, to support medical examiners and medical examiner officers in working more effectively with colleagues and partners. The Royal College of Pathologists recently published the first of these, which considers [how medical examiners can support people of Black, Asian and minority ethnic heritage and their relatives](#). I am very grateful to the college, and to Dr Habib Naqvi MBE, the Director of NHS Race and Health Observatory, who with other colleagues helped to shape this document. I plan to publish papers exploring other relevant issues in coming weeks and months.

We now have medical examiner offices in almost all acute trusts in England, and in all areas of Wales the medical examiner service continues to make excellent progress. I am delighted to welcome Rajiv Prinja to the national medical examiner team in the role of finance analyst for England. I am encouraged that despite pressures, the overwhelming majority of medical examiner offices in England have successfully submitted Q3 data. Together with information from the medical examiner service in Wales, this will provide more comprehensive information about medical examiner activity in both nations.

**Dr Alan Fletcher, National Medical Examiner**

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## Statutory medical examiner system

[The Health and Care White Paper](#) has been published which highlights plans to bring forward measures that contribute to improved quality and safety in the NHS, including the introduction of a statutory medical examiner system. This is a significant step to putting the medical examiner system on a statutory footing. It is anticipated that the non-statutory medical examiner system will continue throughout the 2021/22 financial year whilst parliamentary procedure is followed.

## Working with the Chief Coroner

In December it was announced that the new Chief Coroner is [His Honour Judge Thomas Teague QC](#).

The [seventh annual report of the Chief Coroner](#), covering 2018/2019 and 2019/20 has also been published. The report again expresses support for the medical examiner system, and notes the close work between the National Medical Examiner and the Chief Coroner of England and Wales.

In recent times, progress included publication of the Notification of Deaths Regulations 2019 and associated [guidance](#), which provide a consistent national framework for notifications to coroners.

I wish to thank the previous Chief Coroner, His Honour Judge Mark Lucraft QC, Recorder of London, for his support to the medical examiner system and look forward to working with his successor.

## Good practice series – BAME paper

The Royal College of Pathologists has just published the first of a new series of National Medical Examiner good practice papers. The first of these papers explores [how medical examiners can better meet the needs of people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities](#). It provides recommendations, a summary of the context and background, and links for further reading. This was developed with stakeholders including the Ministry of Justice; Chief Coroners Office; Department of Health and Social Care; Welsh Government; General Register Office; and the Office for National Statistics; along with input from subject matter experts. We plan to add to the series with papers on other topical issues in the coming months.

## Excess deaths and potential delays

Heartfelt thanks are extended to medical examiners and medical examiner officers for their ongoing dedication and commitment despite the unprecedented pressures that trusts and health boards have faced during the pandemic.

Recent weeks have seen the NHS facing huge pressures, and sadly the increase in COVID-19 infections over the Christmas and New Year period has resulted in more deaths than usual. There have been significant implications for medical examiner officers and we are grateful for the hard work and dedication shown across England and Wales. Where the pressures continue, it is worth ensuring that all medical practitioners continue to utilise the [Coronavirus Act easements for excess deaths](#), and continue to work closely with colleagues in related areas such as mortuaries and bereavement services, and registrars. Close working can help reassure members of the public and communities who may have concerns about the impact of the pandemic on death certification processes.

## England – Quarter 3 submissions update

We are delighted the overwhelming majority of medical examiner offices (119) completed their Q3 2020/21 submission. This will help us to process reimbursement payments and also provides very positive information about the continued progress medical examiners are making. We understand the considerable pressures faced by medical examiners and other staff in trusts, and are grateful for these completed submissions. Medical examiner offices that require further support completing their submission should liaise with their regional medical examiner officer.

Q4 data for 2020/21 is due to be submitted via the online portal between 1 April 2021 and 11pm on Monday 19 April 2021. Information on [how to access](#) the [portal](#) has been sent previously. Please contact [reporting.nme@nhs.net](mailto:reporting.nme@nhs.net) if you have any queries.

Separate arrangements are in place for reporting and funding of the medical examiner service in Wales.

## Implementation in Wales

The medical examiner service for Wales is now scrutinising deaths that occur in the majority of acute hospitals, as well as a number of community hospitals and hospices (both NHS and private) and deaths that occur in the community. The team is increasingly able to apply its specialist knowledge and skills across all four regions in Wales.

The impact the service is having is underlined by very positive feedback from the bereaved, coroners offices, registrars and health boards. We are building on this to refine systems and processes to improve services, for example, health boards have committed to provide clinical notes digitally. With remote access to clinical records across Wales, and a fully functioning case management system, medical examiners in any of the four regional offices can scrutinise deaths that occur anywhere in Wales.

Increased COVID-19 infections in Wales are adding to pressures, and although no suspension of service has been required, staff were released to support the front line by completing MCCDs and cremation forms. It is likely that building up and expanding the service will take longer in coming months, particularly as general practices are supporting the vaccination programme.

## Digital update

NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA) continues to make positive progress on the development of a digital system for the medical examiner system. NHSBSA and the Department of Health and Social Care really appreciate medical examiner offices which are supporting user research. Rollout of the medical examiner digital system is anticipated through the financial year 2021/22 and communications to support this will be issued to enable medical examiner officers to plan local implementation. NHSBSA are also undertaking the digitisation of the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death, which is in its early stages of development.

## Medical examiner recruitment

During 2021, there will be a need to recruit more medical examiners, particularly to increase capacity to extend scrutiny to deaths outside acute settings. Previous bulletins and the National Medical Examiners' [Good Practice Guidelines](#) note the importance of appointing medical examiners with a range of specialties and skills. For trusts in England and NWSSP in Wales, this means it is important to advertise widely and ensure that senior doctors in non-

acute providers including GP practices are made aware of employment opportunities and are able to apply. Lead medical examiners are also encouraged to carefully consider the recommendations set out in the good practice series paper regarding [medical examiners and Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities](#). A diverse workforce will widen the skills and perspectives of medical examiner offices and will help medical examiners build links across the healthcare system and with communities.

## Training and events

The Royal College of Pathologists are to be congratulated for reaching a tremendous milestone this month, having [trained the 1000<sup>th</sup> medical examiner](#) on 9 February 2021. This is a fantastic achievement made possible by the dedication and support of the Royal College of Pathologists, the faculty team, and participants.

The continued appetite for medical examiner and medical examiner officer training is extremely encouraging. Additional training dates have been scheduled. Details can be found on the [Royal College of Pathologists' website](#). The medical examiner officer training record and supporting documents are now [available](#).

A reminder that places can also be booked for the [medical examiners' annual conference](#) on 27 April 2020 featuring keynote speakers including Nadine Dorries MP, Minister for Patient Safety, Sir Robert Francis QC (Chair, Healthwatch England), and Keith Conradi (Chief Investigator, HSIB).

## Contact details

We encourage you to continue to raise queries with us and share your thoughts on the introduction of medical examiners, through the [contacts list](#). The page contains contact details for the national medical examiner's office, the medical examiner team in Wales, and regional medical examiner contacts in England.

## Further information

Further information about the programme, including previous editions of this bulletin, can be found on the [national medical examiner](#) webpage.

NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership also has a web page for the [medical examiner system in Wales](#).