New review service set for May 2015 launch

New arrangements for the certification and registration of death are now set to come into force in Scotland on Wednesday 13 May 2015.

The changes, which are set out in the Certification of Death (Scotland) Act 2011, will:

- introduce a new national review system to provide independent checks on the quality and accuracy of Medical Certificates of Cause of Death (MCCDs)
- end additional paperwork and fees for cremations to make the process the same for everyone, and
- mean that all deaths must be registered before either a burial or cremation can take place.

Healthcare Improvement Scotland will run the new independent review service. Reviews will fall under one of two categories. For Level 1 reviews, a Healthcare Improvement Scotland medical reviewer will check the MCCD and speak to the certifying doctor. For Level 2 reviews, the medical reviewer will speak to the certifying doctor and check relevant medical records.

The new system will randomly select about 10% of all deaths for Level 1 review, with additional Level 2 reviews. This does not include sudden or suspicious deaths, which are reported to the Procurator Fiscal, or stillbirths. It means that Healthcare Improvement Scotland will review about 6,000 MCCDs a year out of the approximately 55,000 deaths that occur in Scotland annually.

The new arrangements were originally due to take effect on 29 April 2015, but have been put back by two weeks to accommodate the UK general election which takes place on 7 May 2015.
Scotland’s registrars will play a key role in helping to implement the new arrangements around death certification and registration.

There are 197 registration offices responsible for registering births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships in Scotland.

From 13 May 2015, Healthcare Improvement Scotland will review a sample of MCCDs that have been randomly selected by National Records of Scotland who oversee the registration system in Scotland.

When an MCCD is randomly selected for review, the registrar will be alerted to this by their computer system. The registrar will then notify the informant (the person registering the death) while they are in the registration office to register the death. The registrar will confirm if the MCCD has been selected for a Level 1 or Level 2 review, and explain the process fully to the informant.

After the review is concluded, the registrar will contact the informant to advise them that the Certificate of Registration of Death (also known as the Form 14) can be issued and the funeral can take place.

Cathy Dunlop, Senior Registrar of East Ayrshire Council, has seen a lot of changes during her 20 years as a registrar, but welcomes the introduction of the new review service.

She says: “The main benefit of this new system, from a registrar’s perspective, is that the quality and accuracy of MCCDs will improve. This should make our job easier and reduce the time we spend on contacting doctors to query information they have provided on the MCCD.”
Cathy, whose office in Kilmarnock registers between 20 and 25 deaths a week, acknowledges that the new system will bring challenges too.

As the first point of contact for people registering a death, registrars will not only explain the review process to the people who are experiencing bereavement, they will also be available to reassure them at each stage of the process. How registrars communicate this information to the informant is paramount and they will receive special training ahead of implementation of the new system in May.

The new review service is also likely to impact on the length of daily appointment times, which may mean fewer available appointments in any one day, and there also may be a need for registrars to provide additional out-of-hours cover at weekends.

Nevertheless, Cathy is confident that she and her colleagues can meet the new challenges, while continuing to deliver a professional and compassionate service.

“As registrars, we are accustomed to dealing with people at the happiest and saddest times of their lives. Each situation is different and the registrar needs to adapt accordingly. Sometimes you have people who are extremely upset and are reluctant to speak and give information, or you may have someone who wants to tell you all about their loved one’s life and are laughing and joking recalling the memories. Our primary focus is always to make the process as seamless as possible for families.”
Medical reviewers soon to be in post

Senior Medical Reviewer George Fernie, pictured, is looking forward to welcoming his team of medical reviewers in the coming weeks.

The main role for medical reviewers will be to:

• ensure that the required number of MCCDs are reviewed each year, and
• educate and support certifying doctors to improve the quality and accuracy of completed MCCDs.

Medical reviewers will also have a role in reviewing, verifying and signing off paperwork in cases of people who have died outside the UK and are to be returned to Scotland for burial or cremation.

Interviews for these key positions took place at the end of last year and nine experienced clinicians are set to take up their posts from 1 April.

Although they will be primarily based in Aberdeen, Glasgow and South Queensferry, the medical reviewers will also be required to spend time ‘in the field’ at NHS locations to educate and support certifying doctors with the new system.

George says: “It will be great to welcome the medical reviewers to Healthcare Improvement Scotland. I’m confident we have selected the right people for these important posts. They are all highly experienced clinicians and I believe they will be a real asset to the organisation.”
One of the key requirements in establishing the Death Certification Review Service has been the development of reliable and robust IT systems to underpin it.

Carol Lawrence, NHS National Services Scotland IT Programme Manager, leads on the development of the electronic case management system, a key part of the Healthcare Improvement Scotland programme of work.

For Carol, Wednesday 13 May marks the culmination of two years of intense activity.

Much of the workload so far has centred on developing and testing the functionality of software and interfaces that will support the key parties to exchange data securely.

Carol explains: “National Records of Scotland has developed software to randomly select those MCCDs that will be reviewed by Healthcare Improvement Scotland. When an MCCD is selected by the system, this will then be communicated electronically to the registrar. At the same time, data is transferred out to the Death Certification Review Service for review by the team of medical reviewers. Medical reviewers will use the electronic case management system to record information as they review the MCCD and to track case progress. The registrar will be notified when the review is complete.”

In common with the other agencies working on this project, Carol’s main objective is to help to deliver a system that doesn’t impact negatively on the bereaved at what is likely to be one of the most difficult times in their life.

“Although my focus is on the delivery of IT solutions, I always keep in mind that this is a service for people, and it’s vital we minimise the risk of any delays or disruption to those registering a death.”
Roadshows roll on to spread the word

The National Association of Funeral Directors is taking to the road to spread the word about the new arrangements for death certification and registration.

A series of roadshows is taking place across Scotland to explain the changes that are due to take place as a result of implementation of the Certification of Death (Scotland) Act 2011.

The primary audience for these events is funeral directors and others who arrange funerals, however registrars, NHS staff involved in local implementation activity, representatives from religious and faith groups, and cemetery and crematoria staff are also welcome to attend.

Each event includes a drop-in session, followed by a more formal meeting comprising presentations from the Scottish Government policy team, the Senior Medical Reviewer, a registrar, and the funeral industry, with the opportunity for questions and answers after the presentations.

Alan Slater, Chief Executive Officer of the National Association of Funeral Directors, explains: “This is the first major change in Scottish certification and registration for some considerable time. It is vitally important that we all speak with the same voice in helping those that matter most to us, our bereaved clients.”

The first roadshows took place in early February in Inverness, Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Kelso. The dates and venues for the remaining events are listed below.

If you are interested in attending one of the roadshows please email: christinearmour@scotmidfunerals.co.uk

**Glasgow**  
**Wednesday 18 March**  
Erskine Bridge Hotel, Erskine, Renfrewshire PA8 6AN  
Phone: 0141 812 0123

**Kilmarnock**  
**Thursday 19 March**  
Kilmarnock Registrar’s Office, Burns Monument Centre, Kay Park, Kilmarnock KA3 7RU  
Phone: 01563 576695

**Dumfries**  
**Friday 20 March**  
Cairndale Hotel and Leisure Club, English Street, Dumfries DG1 2DF  
Phone: 01387 254 111
Other developments

Information for the public

The Scottish Government has been working with stakeholders to produce two information leaflets to explain the new arrangements for death certification and registration to the public.

‘Death Certification in Scotland’ will explain the key changes for those registering a death and highlights the role of the new Death Certification Review Service.

A second leaflet produced with stakeholders focuses on advance registration. Applications for advance registration can be made when an MCCD is selected for review but the funeral has to take place quickly.

Applications will be considered in special circumstances such as:

• religious/cultural (for example faith requirements to bury a person’s body quickly)
• compassionate (where delays would cause significant and unnecessary distress), and
• practical/administrative (for example, family have travelled from abroad to attend the funeral).

Both leaflets are due to be available in April.

Questions and answers

If you would like to find out more information about the forthcoming changes to death certification and registration, Healthcare Improvement Scotland has produced a series of Questions and Answers to guide you through the key points.

The Questions and Answers are available at: www.healthcareimprovementscotland.org/deathcert_qa

For more information about the Death Certification Review Service contact Project Officer Rebecca Smith on 0131 623 4606, email rebecca.smith54@nhs.net

If you have any comments on this Briefing Note contact Senior Communications Officer Rob MacPhail on 0141 225 6992, email rob.macphail@nhs.net