

**From the Chief Medical Officer  
Dr Michael McBride**



Department of  
**Health**

An Roinn Sláinte

Máinnystrie O Poustie

[www.health-ni.gov.uk](http://www.health-ni.gov.uk)

**HSS(MD) 90/2020**

**For Action:**

Chief Executives of HSC Trusts

Medical Directors, HSC Trusts (for onward distribution to all Medical Practitioners)

Chief Executive HSCB (for onward distribution to All General Practitioners, Practice Managers, GP Locums and GP Out of Hours Services)

Director of Integrated Care, Health and Social Care Board

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Our Ref: HSS(MD) 90/2020

Date: 23 December 2020

**PLEASE SEE ATTACHED FULL CIRCULATION LIST**

Dear Colleague

**GUIDANCE ON DEATH CERTIFICATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

***Action required***

Chief Executives must ensure that this information is drawn to the attention of all clinical staff to enable them to respond accordingly.

The HSCB must ensure that this information is cascaded to all General Practitioners and OOH facilities immediately.

On 27 March 2020, I issued Circular HSS(MD) 18/2020 providing guidance on the new arrangements for death certification and registration following the introduction of emergency legislation through the Coronavirus Act 2020.

I followed this with a further Circular HSS(MD) 28/2020 on 23 April 2020 which provided specific guidance on the terminology to be used when completing a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) during the pandemic.

Both documents can be accessed on the Department website at the following link:  
[COVID-19 - Guidance surrounding death](#)

Recently, both the General Register Office (GRO) and the Coroner's Service have contacted the Department to advise that some medical practitioners are not complying with the current legislation.

The GRO have indicated that some doctors are not sending MCCDs via e-mail, but rather have reverted to the previous position and are issuing it to the family in order for registration to take place. The change in the legislation was introduced to reduce face to face interaction and informants are not required to personally attend the GRO to register the death. MCCDs must be sent directly to the GRO via e-mail for registration.

The Coroner's Service have advised that some doctors are unnecessarily reporting deaths where they have not seen and treated the deceased in the previous 28 days. The legislation allows a doctor to complete a MCCD without reference to the Coroner, providing the deceased died of natural causes and the doctor can state the cause of death. This applies even in situations where the doctor has not seen or treated the patient in the previous 28 days.

It is an appropriate time therefore to remind colleagues of their statutory responsibilities with particular consideration of the following:

- MCCDs should be completed **as soon as practicable** following a death;
- Once the MCCD is completed it **must be sent directly to the GRO via e-mail** to **[GRO-pandemic@finance-ni.gov.uk](mailto:GRO-pandemic@finance-ni.gov.uk)**
- Contact details of the next of kin and the appointed funeral director (if known) should be included in the e-mail to the GRO;
- MCCDs are **not be given to the next of kin/family** as the death will be registered by GRO upon receipt of the e-mail above;
- Where Covid-19 was either the direct or underlying cause of death or a contributory factor, the following terminology should be used:
  - **Covid-19 (confirmed)** where there has been a laboratory confirmed positive Covid-19 test
  - **Covid-19 or Probable/Suspected Covid-19** where, in the absence of a confirmed test, the certifying doctor believes (using available evidence and information) that the disease caused, is assumed to have caused, or contributed to the death.
- If the deceased died from **natural causes** and the **certifying doctor can state the cause of death** to best of their knowledge and belief a MCCD can be completed. There is currently **no requirement to have and seen and treated the patient within the previous 28 days** and **consequently, no requirement to report such a death to the Coroner.**

