



## Bereavement Information, Advice and Guidance on WHAT TO DO NOW



### WHAT TO DO NOW

Please Telephone the Bereavement Services where a Bereavement Officer will provide you with important information that you will need.

#### Queen Alexandra Hospital

Tel: 023 9228 6175 (Monday - Friday between 10am and 4pm)

This booklet should guide and help you at this difficult time ....

Please read it carefully as it will help with the arrangements you will need to make.



### Specialist Support

If you require this leaflet in another language, large print or another format, please contact the Health Information Centre Tel: (023) 9228 6757, who will advise you.



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### Introduction

The Trust staff are ready to offer you support in a variety of ways.

This booklet is intended to guide you through the procedures that are necessary and to help you make best use of people and resources available.

When a relative or friend dies the pain and distress can be intense. Hopes, dreams and potential roles are dashed. It can be a time of great confusion, not least because every loss is unique and every person's reaction will be different.

### Bereavement services

The Bereavement Officer is your first contact point for collecting documentation and any personal effects.

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When you phone the bereavement services, you may find it necessary to leave a message on our answer phone. Should this be the case, it is recommended that you leave only **one** message with your name, telephone number(s) and the name of the person you are enquiring about.

A member of staff from the bereavement team will contact you as soon as possible.

**Please note:** There are legal processes surrounding death certificates and cremation paperwork which must be adhered to. Therefore you may not be able to collect the paperwork you require for a few days. The bereavement officer will advise you when she returns your call.

The Bereavement Officers will provide you with additional information that will help guide you through the necessary practical arrangements.

**Please note - an appointment is always necessary to see the Bereavement Officer.**

### Hospital Chaplains

Chaplains are available to listen to you and offer emotional support and spiritual care.

### Viewing

We would normally recommend that any persons wishing to view the deceased make arrangements through their chosen Funeral Director to view at their premises.

However, in some circumstances, where the next of kin have had to travel a long distance and were unable to be present at or near the time of death, it is possible to arrange to view the deceased in a quiet room within the hospital mortuary.

An appointment is always necessary. Please contact the mortuary in advance for an appointment.

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Between the hours of 8.30am-4pm Monday-Friday, with exception of bank holidays, please telephone the mortuary direct on (023) 9228 6305.

Outside these hours and weekends please telephone the hospital switchboard staff on (023) 9228 6000 who will advise you what to do next.

## Arranging a funeral Responsibilities and Choices

The next-of-kin or executor (person in charge of the will) is generally responsible for making arrangements for the funeral. Decisions that need to be made may include:

- Burial or cremation: did the deceased leave instruction?
- Flowers or Donations to a charity?
- Who should be notified / invited to the funeral?
- Is a newspaper announcement appropriate?
- Where and when to hold the funeral service?

## Finding a Funeral Director

You may know someone who is able to recommend a Funeral Director. If not, a list of Funeral Directors can be found in local directories or there is a website address, [www.yourfuneralchoice.com](http://www.yourfuneralchoice.com) which will give you independent and impartial information. Some Funeral Directors can be contacted 24 hours a day, including weekends. They will explain everything that will help you make the necessary arrangements and advise on the timing of the funeral service.

You may find it helpful to obtain two or three written estimates as costs may vary. Do not be afraid to discuss ways of reducing the costs with the Funeral Director.

You may be entitled to a bereavement grant to help towards the cost of the funeral. To find out more visit [www.gov.uk/browse/benefits](http://www.gov.uk/browse/benefits) or contact your local jobcentre plus.

## Arranging the funeral service

Tell the Funeral Director what you would like to happen. Remember you are paying for their services therefore you should be able to state your preferences for the funeral arrangements.

Do not be pressured into holding a funeral service until you feel ready. You may forget to mention something important to the funeral director concerning the funeral arrangements, which you might regret for a long time afterwards.

The funeral director will be able to help you find a minister or another suitably qualified person to officiate at the funeral who will liaise with you about the content of the service.

Dates and times discussed should be regarded as **strictly provisional** until your funeral director has confirmed with the hospital that all the necessary paperwork is completed. Your Funeral Director will require:

- The Certificate authorising Burial or Cremation (green form) which the Registrar will have given you at the time you registered the death
- OR** - If the Coroner has been involved
- Order for Burial (form 101) or the Certificate of Cremation (form 6) that the coroner will have given the Funeral Director.

## Taking the deceased to another country for the funeral

You should take the earliest opportunity to inform your funeral director if you wish to do this. The funeral director will be able to obtain the necessary documentation and guide you through the process.

## Coroner Involvement

There are many reasons why a doctor legally needs to discuss a case with the coroner.

The most common reasons are:-

- If deceased was in hospital under 24 hours unless known to palliative care.
- If there was any trauma, physical injury or violence contributing to the death, whenever such occurred.
- If death occurred during surgery or anaesthesia or within 24 hours of either.
- If the death may be related to a medical procedure or treatment, whether invasive or not.
- If the death was caused directly by an alcoholic event.
- If the death could be due to an industrial disease or related in any way to the deceased's work or employment (i.e Asbestos-related).
- If there are multiple pre-existing medical conditions.

### **Please note – this is not an exhaustive list.**

The Bereavement Officer will advise you if the deceased has met criteria for a referral to the Coroner.

Usually once the doctor has discussed the case, the coroner will allow the necessary paperwork to be issued by the doctor in the hospital.

This process is known as a **“coroner clearance”**. The coroner will need to send some paperwork to the Register office to confirm the agreed cause of death.

This process can sometimes delay relatives from registering a death for approximately a further 24 hours. The Bereavement Officer will advise you of any delays.

Please note that delays may be slightly longer if there are public holidays.

Occasionally the coroner will **not** allow any paperwork to be issued by the doctor and based on the evidence and discussion with the coroner a post mortem will need to be performed.

The referring doctor or bereavement officer will advise you further on what to do next.

## Useful telephone numbers

It can be difficult enough dealing with bereavement without having to deal with sorting and disposing of the deceased's clothing, possessions and personal matters. It may help to take advice from others, such as a solicitor, friends and family members.

## Other people who may need to be informed about the death

- Local Social Services - for home helps, meals on wheels, day centre attendance or transport.
- Local hospitals to cancel outstanding appointments, similarly clinics such as podiatrist or dietician.
- GP - who may be able to help if you are experiencing sleepless nights or other ill effects from the upheaval which comes with bereavement.
- Gas, electricity, telephone, mail, water rates, council tax.
- Bank, Building Society, credit card issuer.
- Local deliveries, newsagent, milk etc.
- Passport office
- DVLA (Driving License and Registration documents)

## How you might be feeling...

**Reliving the event** - you may become very preoccupied with difficult or upsetting events and find yourself going over and over the details as you try to make some sense of what has happened. Flashbacks and dreams are common and can bring back painful memories.

**Sadness** - you may be feeling great sadness both for the person who has died and for yourself and what you have lost.

**Helplessness** - traumatic events can make us feel helpless as we have been unable to prevent the death of someone close to us.

**Feeling frightened** - the loss of someone close can make you feel very anxious and tense. You may have a mixture of fears that mean you feel unsafe and have to be near family or stay indoors. This may feel out of character. You may fear that you will break down or lose control.

**Numbness** - the shock of losing someone close can leave you feeling numb. Events can seem unreal or like a dream for some time after. You may feel unable to express your feelings and need to withdraw from contact with other people for a while.

**Anger** - you may feel great anger

- At what has happened
- At whoever seems to have caused it or allowed it to happen
- At the injustice or senselessness of it all
- At the lack of understanding shown by other people
- That the world is carrying on around you as if nothing has happened
- Towards the person who has died, for leaving you
- And ask "why me?"

**Guilt** - grief often creates a tendency to blame ourselves for things beyond our control. Although often unrealistic, guilt can be temporarily overwhelming.

**Cut Off** - family and friends do not know whether to mention the person who died. They may avoid you because they do not know what to say.

**Ashamed** - you may feel ashamed that you or someone close to you has acted in a way you did not expect.

**Sense of relief** - you may feel a sense of relief that you have come to the end of a difficult time.

## How you might be physically affected...

Some physical effects can occur soon after a bereavement or may begin to develop some months later.



**Tiredness and exhaustion** - your body may continue to be physically and emotionally tense which can lead to a lack of sleep and difficulty in resting and relaxing.

**Muscle tension** - can be a result of your emotional stress and can be accompanied by general symptoms of stiffness and tension as well as more severe feelings like choking sensations in the throat, chest tightness, headaches, localised pains and dizziness.

**Palpitations** - sometimes you might get more extreme sensations of panic with shortness of breath, excessive sweating and mild tremors/shaking.

**Loss of appetite** - you may not feel like cooking or eating for a while, but it is important to continue to try to eat normal meals.

**Depression** - it is normal to feel great sadness and grief, but occasionally, if prolonged and overwhelming, these can indicate the possibility of clinical depression.





If you are concerned about any physical symptoms visit your GP. If you do visit the GP always mention the bereavement.

### When to ask for help ...

You may wish to seek help if you feel some of the following:



- Overwhelmed and can find no relief from the tension and confusion.
- That you have had to keep active, over a long period, to avoid feeling upset.
- That you have no one to openly share your feelings.
- You find yourself relying more and more on medication
- You find yourself increasing your intake of substances such as drugs or alcohol to dull the pain temporarily.

### It is important to get help if this happens often

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- Your relationships seem to be suffering badly or sexual problems develop.
  - You have accidents.
  - Your work performance is suffering.
  - You are suffering from recurrent exhaustion.
  - You are concerned about how your children are coping with bereavement.
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### What you can do to help yourself

- Accept that it is normal **not** to feel normal at this time.
- Make sure you know what did happen rather than rely on what you think has happened. Talking to people who do know what happened or returning to the scene are ways in which a situation which seems 'unbelievable' may be made more real and easier to bear.

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- Attending the funeral underlines the reality of the person's death and gives an opportunity for a formal goodbye to be said.
  - Allow yourself to experience the feelings you have about what has happened and talk to others about it. Many people find it helpful to talk over and over again about what has happened and how they feel about it.
  - Some return to routine can help. Do leave yourself enough time, however, to reflect on what has happened and on your feelings.
  - It is always important to keep in good physical health: keep to a regular routine of eating, sleeping, exercise, and relaxation.



## Some immediate contact points

**Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust**  
(023) 9228 6000 (Switchboard)

### **Bereavement Services**

Queen Alexandra Hospital (023) 9228 6175  
(Monday - Friday 10am - 4pm)

### **Chaplaincy**

Queen Alexandra Hospital (023) 9228 6408

### **Mortuary**

For viewing deceased patients (see page 3)

## Information we hold about you and your rights under the Data Protection Act

Please refer to the booklet 'Your Healthcare Information – Your Rights! Our Responsibilities!' for further guidance.

## How to comment on your experience

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer your questions. However, if you have any concerns you can also contact the Patient Experience Service on 0800 917 6039 or E-mail: [pht.pals@porthosp.nhs.uk](mailto:pht.pals@porthosp.nhs.uk)

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