

Death in Hospital Policy



Title:

Death in Hospital Policy

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Approved by:	NHS Lothian Policy Approval Group		
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Author/s:	Bereavement Coordinators		
Policy Owner/s:	Nurse Director (Acute Services)		
Executive Lead:	Executive Nurse Director		
Target Audience:	All staff with responsibility for and/or involvement in the care of people who have died and their families.		
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Version Control

Date	Author	Version/Page	Reason for change
Aug 2019 - March 2020	Bereavement Coordinators	v0.1-4	Under review. Need to separate out previous policy from procedures into standalone documents using new templates and guidance. Updated policy statement to reflect Lothian Values and person-centred care. Executive Summary and Implementation section added. Consultation section amended due to need for expedited approval process.
March 2020	Bereavement Coordinators	v1.0	Approved by Executive Nurse Director
March - Nov 2023	Bereavement Coordinators	v1.1-2	Under review
Dec 2023	Bereavement Coordinators	v2.0	Approved by the Policy Approval Group

Executive Summary

NHS Lothian is committed to ensuring that patients who die in inpatient settings receive high quality, person-centred and dignified care after death, and that their families are well supported. This policy applies to multi-disciplinary staff who, by virtue of their professional roles and responsibilities, may be involved in the care of people who have died, and their families.

The policy confirms that the personal, spiritual, faith and cultural values, beliefs and identity of the deceased person must be respected if known, and followed where possible. People who are bereaved following a death in hospital must receive information, care and support appropriate to their needs and circumstances. Death certification and notifications must be completed promptly, accurately and effectively in order to ensure a smooth process and prevent further distress to people who have been bereaved.

The policy is supported by [NHS Lothian's Death in Hospital procedures](#), which provides detailed guidance for staff involved in caring for deceased patients and supporting bereaved families.

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1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that:

- people who die in NHS Lothian’s hospitals and other inpatient settings continue to receive high quality, person-centred and dignified care after death;
- people who are bereaved are offered appropriate information, guidance and support;
- staff who care for those who have died or people who have been bereaved have access to appropriate training, education and support.

2.0 Policy statement

Care of a person after death is an important aspect of clinical care which must be provided with kindness, dignity and respect at all times.

In line with [NHS Lothian Values](#) and our Public Sector Equality Duty, the personal, spiritual, faith and cultural values, beliefs and identity of the deceased person must be respected if known, and followed where possible. In deaths which involve police investigation on behalf of the Procurator Fiscal, individuals’ preferences and wishes will be considered but may not be followed if they conflict with legal requirements or forensic practice.

People who are bereaved following a death in hospital must receive information, care and support appropriate to their needs and circumstances. Support should be provided in response to the personal, spiritual, faith and cultural values, beliefs and identity of those who have been bereaved. All families must be offered high quality information and guidance on what to do next, including practical information and details of organisations which can provide ongoing support in the community.

Death certification and notifications must be completed promptly, accurately and effectively in order to ensure a smooth process and prevent further distress to people who have been bereaved. All staff have a duty to respect and maintain the confidentiality of patient information relating to the deceased.

NHS Lothian’s [Death in Hospital Procedures](#) provide detailed guidance for staff involved in caring for people who have died and for supporting their families. It is essential that all members of staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities in the relation to the [Death in Hospital Procedures](#). Staff involved in caring for deceased patients and supporting bereaved families must have access to education, training and support appropriate to their roles and responsibilities.

3.0 Scope

This policy applies to all in-patient care settings within NHS Lothian, including hospitals and hospital-based complex clinical care units.

This policy applies to multi-disciplinary staff, including medical and nursing staff, mortuary staff, porters etc, who by virtue of their professional roles and responsibilities may be involved in the care of people who have died and their families.

Any local site or service-specific procedures must be consistent with this overarching policy.

4.0 Definitions

The term 'hospital' includes all inpatient care settings within NHS Lothian, including hospitals and hospital-based complex clinical care units.

The terms 'people who have been bereaved' and 'family/families' include relatives who may be significantly affected by the death of a patient as well as non-familial relations such as partners, friends of long-standing and significant others as appropriate.

5.0 Implementation roles and responsibilities

5.1 Executive Lead

This policy and the supporting [Death in Hospital Procedures](#) have clinical, legal and procedural aspects. The Executive Nurse Director has strategic leadership of this policy. The Nurse Director (Acute) has responsibility for Spiritual Care and Bereavement Services across NHS Lothian.

5.2 Managers

Line managers are responsible for ensuring that relevant staff within their line management are made aware of, and implement, this policy and the [Death in Hospital Procedures](#) which support it.

5.3 NHS Lothian staff

It is the responsibility of all staff within NHS Lothian who are involved with care of people who have died and their families, to ensure that they provide high quality, person-centred and dignified care.

6.0 Associated materials

The following associated materials were approved by the NHS Lothian Nurse Directors Group.

NHS Lothian [Death in Hospital Procedures](#) including:

- Support for the family
- Confirmation of Death
- Authorisation for Organ/Tissue Donation
- Reporting Deaths to the Procurator Fiscal

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- Completion of Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) and Review Process
 - Infection Control (Death in Hospital)
 - Deceased Patients containing Radioactive Material
 - Safe Management of Pacemakers and other implanted devices
 - Personal Care after death (Last Offices)
 - Transfer of Deceased Person from ward to care of mortuary/funeral director
 - Returning the deceased person's property to family
 - Viewing the deceased person
 - Authorisation for hospital post mortem examination
 - Donation of body for medical education, training or research
 - Paperwork for repatriation of bodies and funerals outwith Scotland
 - Release of the deceased person (to the Funeral Director)
 - Notifying the GP
 - Patients with no known next of kin, or relatives who are unwilling or unable to make arrangements
 - Training and Support for staff

[Guidance](#), including:

- Pandemic COVID-19 – CMO-COPFS-Police Scotland ltr re MCCD provision – Final – 24 Mar 2020
- Supplementary Guidance for Deaths in Hospital during COVID-19 Pandemic
- Deaths that must be reported to the Procurator Fiscal
- Completing and Issuing MCCD and Bereavement Information for all Inpatient Deaths during COVID-19

[Forms and charts](#), including:

- Form PM8 (Deaths in Hospital) Information for the Pathologist
- Medical Interventional Equipment Record Sheet
- Deceased Inpatient Notification Form
- Bodies Containing Radioactive Material
- Transfer to Mortuary Flowchart
- Executor Indemnity Form
- Next of Kin Indemnity Form
- Notification of Discharge Death Form
- Freedom from Infection Form for Repatriation
- Final Act of Care Checklist

[Patient Information](#), including:

- Arrangements following your pregnancy loss 12-24 weeks
- Arrangements following your pregnancy loss under 12 weeks

- When a Child Dies in Hospital
- Arranging Your Child's Funeral
- Bereavement – Coping with Grief
- Registering Your Child's Death
- Supporting children when a sibling has died
- Useful Contacts support for bereaved parents families and carers
- When Your Child Has Died Suddenly
- When Someone Has Died
- Rainbow Pack – When a child dies – The Child Death Review Process

[NHS Lothian Confirmation of Death Policy](#), approved by the NHS Lothian Executive Nurse Director, April 2020

[NHS Lothian Confirmation of Death Procedure](#), Confirmation of Death SLWG, April 2021

[Confirmation of Death: Flowchart for Community Nurses](#), April 2020

[NHS Lothian Complaints Handling Procedure](#), May 2021

7.0 Evidence base

[Death Certification in Scotland: COVID-19 useful information \(healthcareimprovementscotland.org\)](#)

[Scottish Government CEL 9 \(2011\) Shaping Bereavement Care – a framework for action](#)

[Scottish Government \(2015\) Strategic Framework for Action on Palliative and End of Life Care](#)

[Multi-Faith Resource for Healthcare Staff | Turas | Learn \(nhs.scot\)](#)

[Supporting LGBT people around bereavement | Support Around Death \(scot.nhs.uk\)](#)

8.0 Stakeholder consultation

The Death in Hospital Policy was developed and reviewed by a multi-disciplinary working group with input from a range of professional stakeholders. Feedback from stakeholder consultation was considered by the working group in the final policy.

9.0 Monitoring and review

This policy will be subject to review three years from the date of approval, or sooner if required in response to legislation, guidance, research evidence or other changes.

It will be the primary responsibility of clinical staff to initiate audits in their local areas, to measure the impact of the Death in Hospital Policy in practice.

Clinical competence will be monitored locally as part of the Personal Development Planning and Review Process

Feedback will be sought from staff and relatives through a variety of feedback tools.

Complaints involving care after death and bereavement issues will be monitored through the [NHS Lothian Complaints Handling Procedure](#).