

Directorate of Chief Medical Officer  
Crown Agent and Chief Executive of Crown  
Office  
and Procurator Fiscal Service



Dear Colleague

## REPORTING DEATHS TO THE PROCURATOR FISCAL GUIDANCE

1. This letter brings to your attention a recent addition to the categories of deaths which must be reported to the Procurator Fiscal (PF) by medical practitioners.

### Background

2. Currently, many deaths of people who are subject to mental health supervision, whether in the hospital or the community, at the time of death are not currently reported to the PF as they are assessed as straight forward “natural” deaths. There may however be a small number of cases where some further investigation is required into the circumstances of the death. This will enable discretionary Fatal Accident Inquiries (FAI) as appropriate, as in any reported death.

3. The Lord Advocate has directed that the medical profession working in Scotland should be made aware that the guidance has been expanded to include a new section in relation to those who die while subject to compulsory treatment under the mental health legislation - **see paragraph 7.**

4. The change relates to the death of any person who was subject to compulsory treatment under mental health legislation at the time of their death. This includes anyone who was detained or liable to be detained under the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 or part IV of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995.

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2003/13/contents>

5. The change has been introduced to ensure that these deaths are given the appropriate level of scrutiny in accordance with Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

**From: Chief Medical Officer  
Dr Catherine Calderwood**

**Crown Agent and Chief  
Executive  
Catherine Dyer**

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#### Enquiries to:

Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal  
Service issues

David Green

Head of the Scottish Fatalities

Investigation Unit (SFIU) COPFS

[Laura.Docherty@copfs.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Laura.Docherty@copfs.gsi.gov.uk)

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#### Addresses

##### For action

NHS Board Medical Directors – to cascade to all doctors, including GPs  
NHS Board and Special Board Chief Executives

##### For information

NHS Board Directors of Public Health  
NHS Board and Special Board Chairs  
NHS Board Primary Care Leads  
Chief Executives of Local Authorities  
Bereavement Co-ordinators of Health Boards  
Medical Records Managers  
British Medical Association  
General Medical Council  
Medical and Dental Defence Union of Scotland  
Medical Protection Society  
Medical Defence Union  
Academy of Medical Royal Colleges and Faculties in Scotland  
COPFS – to cascade to Forensic Pathologists  
Community Hospitals  
Hospices  
Independent hospitals  
Police Scotland

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#### Further Enquiries

##### For clinical issues

Dr Mini Mishra

Senior Medical Officer

St Andrew's House

EDINBURGH EH1 3DG

[Mini.mishra@gov.scot](mailto:Mini.mishra@gov.scot)

6. Suicidal or accidental death of anyone under such care should continue to be reported to the PF as usual. Therefore, it is not anticipated that this will significantly increase the numbers of deaths reported to the PF.

7. The new section of the guidance is as follows:

### ***Categories of Death to be Reported***

#### ***(f) Deaths while subject to compulsory treatment under mental health legislation***

***Any death of a person who was, at the time of death:***

- ***detained or liable to be detained under the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 or Part VI of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995; or***
- ***subject to a community based compulsory treatment order or compulsion order under the above provisions.***

***The full guidance is available on the COPFS website:***

***<http://www.copfs.gov.uk/publications/deaths>***

8. This form of wording has been discussed with the Chief Executive of the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland, who advised that this would cover all relevant situations, including:

- those who are detained in a hospital;
- those who are subject to a community-based compulsory treatment order, which may include a range of restrictions on their liberty and provisions to have them compulsorily admitted to hospital if they don't comply with the terms of the order; and
- those who are subject to a hospital-based compulsory treatment order, but whose detention has been suspended for a period of time to assess if the patient can manage in the community.

### **Action**

9. When anyone dies in the above circumstances, the medical practitioner should report the death to the PF in the usual manner. The CMO/COPFS guidance about electronic reporting to the PF is available through the link below.

***[Electronic reporting of deaths to the Procurator Fiscal](#)***

10. We would be grateful that this information is passed on to all doctors and relevant staff in your area, as soon as possible.

Many thanks for your assistance in this matter.

Yours sincerely

*Catherine Calderwood*

*Catherine Dyer*