Dear Colleague

VERIFICATION OF DEATH

Attached is updated guidance on verification of death which has been produced by the National Medical and the National Nursing and Midwifery Advisory Committees.

This new guidance, which replaces the 1976 circular, will be of interest to general practitioners, some hospital doctors, nursing homes (and other similar establishments) and appropriate nursing staff and we seek your assistance in distributing this information as follows:

CAMOs to General Practitioners

Medical Directors of Trusts to hospital medical staff as appropriate

CANOs to Nursing Homes (and other similar establishments)

Directors of Nursing Services to nursing staff as appropriate

We should be grateful if you could distribute the enclosed letter as soon as you can conveniently do so.

Yours sincerely

ROBERT KENDELL
Chief Medical Officer

ANNE JARVIE
Chief Nursing Officer

From the
Chief Medical Officer

Dr R E Kendell CBE MD FRSE

From the
Chief Nursing Officer

Miss Anne Jarvie RGN RM BA

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16 March 1995

SOHHD/CNO(95)5
SOHHD/CNO(95)1

For action
Chief Area Medical Officers
Medical Directors of Trusts
Chief Area Nursing Officers
Directors of Nursing Services

For information
General Managers Chief Executives, NHS Trusts

General Manager (HEBS)

Further enquiries
Dr A Keel
Room 118
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Dear Colleague

VERIFICATION OF DEATH

Last year the Scottish Hospital Advisory Service notified The Scottish Office Home and Health Department that the existing guidance on verification of death - described in circular NHS 1976 (GEN)67 - was not being observed in some parts of the country. Partly for this reason, and partly because this circular was nearly 20 years old, we asked the National Medical Advisory Committee and National Nursing and Midwifery Advisory Committee to advise us whether this 1976 guidance was still appropriate. Representatives of the two professional advisory committees met on 9 January 1995 and formulated revised guidance which was subsequently formally endorsed by both committees and accepted by us.

This revised guidance, which now replaces the 1976 circular, is as follows:

In all unexpected deaths, regardless of context or setting, verification of death is the responsibility of a medical practitioner.

In expected deaths, defined as deaths occurring at a stage in the patient's disease process at which death is inevitable, and no active treatment is planned or appropriate, death may be verified by a registered nurse if he or she is employed to care for that patient or employed by the hospital, nursing home, residential home or community nursing services caring for that patient. This applies to expected deaths in hospitals, in nursing homes, in residential homes, in patients' own homes, in hotels, hostels or other residential settings.

From the Chief Medical Officer
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16 March 1995
SOHHD/CMO(95)6
SOHHD/CNO(95)1

For action
General Practitioners
Hospital Medical Staff
(as appropriate)
Nursing Homes (and similar establishments)
Nursing Staff (as appropriate)

For information
General Managers Chief Executives, NHS Trusts
General Manager (HEBS)

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It will be for NHS Trusts and other employers of registered nurses to ensure that the training needs identified for those nurses likely to be involved in verification of deaths are met.

Whenever a registered nurse verifies an expected death

That nurse is responsible for informing the relevant medical practitioner, at a time consistent with local policies.

He or she has authority to notify the patient's relatives and to make appropriate arrangements for removal of the body, again in accord with local policies.

Certification of death remains the responsibility of a medical practitioner in all circumstances. So does referral to a procurator fiscal, and any request for autopsy.

Local arrangements should be made in consultation with medical and nursing staff for implementation of this guidance.

Yours sincerely

ROBERT KENDELL
Chief Medical Officer

ANNE JARVIE
Chief Nursing Officer