Suggested Outline for Post Mortem Information Leaflet for Hospital Postmortems

Introduction
- Hard to make decisions when grieving.
- But need to decide as soon as possible whether to allow the hospital to carry out Post Mortem Examination.
- Leaflet aimed to provide information to help make this decision. Should also be given the opportunity to talk to (Consultant/ pathologist/ member of the nursing staff) about the Post Mortem examination and be given the opportunity to have any questions answered. Space for name and contact details of relevant member of staff to be included on the form?

Purpose/ Benefits of a Post Mortem Examination
- Brief explanation of what a Post Mortem is.
- To establish cause of death & the effect of treatment.
- Can sometimes provide important information about genetic diseases/ conditions.
- Can also provide information which will help treat other patients.
- Can provide information about disease/therapy as a result of research.
- May be of benefit for medical education

Types of Post Mortem Examination

- Hospital Post Mortem.
  - Consent must be given either in advance by the now-deceased person where competent to do so, or by relatives, before a post mortem examination can be carried out.
  - The views of the deceased on this matter and of any other close relatives should be reflected in the final decision. The wishes of the deceased, when an adult, as to disposal of organs, etc should be respected and where no information is available about this, the views of the relatives should be followed by the hospital.
  - Consent should only be sought from relatives after they have been given the opportunity of having an explanation of the purpose of the Examination and there has been an opportunity for relatives to ask any questions.
  - Relatives will be able to change their mind about any decisions made.

- Procurator Fiscal’s Post Mortem.
  - Circumstances under which such a Post Mortem is necessary.
  - Consent of relatives not necessary for the Post Mortem but the procedures should be explained & relatives should be given the opportunity to ask questions.
  - Although a Procurator Fiscal Post Mortem is requested by the Fiscal, hospitals often have a role to play in the dissemination of information. Hospitals also remain responsible for any retained organs or tissues that they may have as a result of a Procurator Fiscal postmortem.
  - Guidelines and information concerning Procurator Fiscal postmortems should be obtained from the Crown Office and procurator Fiscal Service.

Explanation of a Post Mortem Examination

Background
- Carried out by Pathologist & assisted by a technician.
- Carried out in the hospital mortuary/ local public or police mortuary.
-Carried out with the same care and attention as any other operation, in respectful manner & with regard to the feelings of bereaved relatives.

**Detail**
- Definition of tissue and organ
- External examination possibly with photographs & x-rays.
- Cuts made on the front of the body & at the back of the head (sometimes possible through pre-existing surgical incision).
- These will not be visible once the body has been sewn up and dressed for burial/cremation.
- Removal of internal organs for examination. These will be returned to the body immediately after the examination unless consent has been given for them to be retained for further examination as part of the postmortem or for other specified and agreed purposes.
- Retention of tissue blocks and fluid samples. These are usually kept indefinitely as they form an important part of the patient’s record. Possible to request for them to be destroyed or returned once the initial diagnosis has been made.

**Keeping Some Organs**
- Sometimes necessary to keep organs once the Post Mortem has been completed so that they can be studied in more detail to allow a fuller diagnosis to be made.
- Only to be done with consent of relatives, or the deceased where an adult.
- Should be given the opportunity to discuss this with the consultant/pathologist.
- Should also be given the opportunity to discuss what should happen to the organs once tests have been completed.
  - respectful cremation by the hospital.
  - return for cremation/burial.
  - may be possible for the organs to be re-united with the body prior to the funeral but this might mean that the funeral would be delayed.

**Keeping Organs &/or Tissues for Research/ Education**
- Sometimes might be useful for organs or tissue samples to be kept for education/training research.
- Benefit of this.
- Consent necessary & may be refused.
- Clinician/pathologist should explain how long the organs/tissues blocks will be kept for.
- Should discuss what should happen to the organs once they are no longer needed:
  - respectful cremation by the hospital
  - return for cremation/burial.
- In the case of research should be given the opportunity to express their views on what they view to be the acceptable parameters of potential research, or to give a general consent for research use without the need to be re-contacted.
- In the case of research, there should either be evidence that the project has been approved by the appropriate Research Ethics Committee, or that any research protocol will be submitted to the Research ethics Committee for approval before it is commenced.
- Consent for continued retention by relatives can be withdrawn at any time.

**Other Post Mortem Options**
- May be possible for a limited post mortem to be carried out.
  - Can be confined to an external examination.
  - Can be confined to certain organs/parts of the body.
Implications of partial Post Mortem for establishing cause of death.

Should be given the opportunity to discuss a limited Post Mortem with the consultant/pathologist, or other appropriate member of the health care team (for example, nurses/midwives here).

In some cases, imaging may be sufficient – this option should be discussed by the consultant/pathologist/other member of the health care team.

Timing of the Post Mortem and Results

**Timing**
- Carried out as soon as possible after death (generally within 2/3 working days).
- Efforts should be made to carry it out sooner if required for religious reasons.
- Examination may take up to 3 hours.
- Full Post Mortem may take longer if detailed examination of certain organs is necessary—possibly several weeks. This will delay the funeral if the organs are to be united with the body before burial/cremation.

**Post Mortem Results**
- Will be sent to the consultant & GP by the pathologist, normally six to eight weeks after the Post Mortem.
- Can request an appointment with the consultant/GP to discuss the results.
- Can also request a report in non-medical language from the pathologist.
- Procedure for Procurator Fiscal Post Mortems.

Bullet Point Summary of Main Points

Support and Information Contact List

(Glossary of terms to be avoided by the use of clear language and explanation of any necessary technical terms within the text)