

What do I do now?

A practical guide for families
following a death



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Explore our website to find out more about how we could help you, or call our 24 hour advice line
01233 504 133

Everyone on the hospice team would like to express their sincere condolences to you at this sad time.

Following the death of a loved one, it is necessary to make a number of arrangements and carry out certain tasks. We understand that this is likely to be an unfamiliar and difficult situation.

This booklet aims to provide support on grief, as well as practical advice and guidance on what to do and when. We hope that you will find this booklet useful over the next few days.

Coping with grief

Grief is not a single event but rather a process that takes time to work through. There is no time limit or right or wrong way to feel grief – it is an individual and personal experience.

During grief you may experience a whole range of feelings and emotions such as anger, shock, sadness, guilt and denial. These feelings and emotions are a normal reaction to

bereavement and are not necessarily a sign that you are unable to cope.

It is important that you allow yourself time to grieve and to come to terms with your loss in whatever way is right for you.

Some people can journey through their grief without the need for additional support, whilst others may find it helpful to talk to a professional or with other people going through similar experiences.

Pilgrims Hospices offer a range of bereavement services such as support groups, drop-in sessions and one-to-one counselling.

Our psychological and bereavement team of counsellors, social workers and spiritual care leads are available to offer both practical and emotional support to you.

Our booklets Facing Loss, Counselling Services and Caring for your Spiritual Needs give more information about the services we provide and contain details of other organisations that offer support.

Our Facing Loss booklet will be posted to you around two months after bereavement. If you would like a copy sooner, please ask a member of staff.

The days that follow bereavement are very difficult and carrying out practical tasks can be hard. There are formalities that will need prompt attention. Please read on to find out more about these.

How do I collect the Medical Cause of Death Certificate?

The Medical Cause of Death Certificate can take up to three working days to produce. This is

because the doctor who treated your loved one is responsible for completing the form and he or she may not be at the hospice for a day or two.

There may be a delay if the patient needs to be referred to the Coroner. We cover this later in the booklet.

Once the certificate has been issued it will be scanned and sent directly to the Registry Office, along with contact details of the Next of Kin / informant. The Registrar will then make contact with the Next of Kin / informant to complete registration over the phone.



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What happens to personal effects and belongings?

If your loved one's personal property hasn't already been returned to you, it will have been stored in a safe for you to collect. A member of the ward staff will contact you to arrange a time to collect any property and valuables.

Uncollected valuables are kept for a period of six months, during which time we will endeavour to contact you. After six months, we will dispose of it in an appropriate manner.

Sometimes jewellery is left on your loved one's person, particularly rings and earrings. We will have listed these items and the funeral director will be able to remove the items should you wish to have them.

What happens if the Coroner needs to be involved?

There are specific circumstances when the hospice doctor is required by law to refer to the Coroner.

These include recent falls, recent surgery, some diagnosis such as mesothelioma and where the patient has been in the hospice for less than 24 hours. The nursing staff and unit clerk will advise you if this is necessary.

In some circumstances, the Coroner may arrange for a post-mortem examination. The Coroner has the legal right to order a post-mortem. The Coroner's Officer will contact you or the next of kin to explain the reason for their involvement and why the post-mortem is necessary. There could be delays as a consequence of the Coroner's involvement that are beyond our control. This can add to

what is already a difficult time and we understand that feelings of concern and frustration can be caused.

For all general enquiries to the Coroner's Office, please call **03000 410502**.

How is death registered?

All deaths that are not subject to a Coroner's inquiry should be registered within five working days with the Registrar of Births and Deaths.

If there are delays due to the Coroner's involvement, the Registrar will understand. However, it is advisable to telephone them to inform them of any delays. Once the Medical Cause of Death Certificate has been emailed to the Registrar, they will call you to register over the phone. You will not physically have to make an appointment to see them in person.



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Who else needs to know?

There are many organisations and agencies that will need to be informed. In Kent, the 'Tell Us Once' service makes this process easier.

You only need to provide the details to the Department for Work and Pensions once and they will notify the organisations that need to know.

The information can be found here:

- www.kent.gov.uk/birthsceremonies-and-deaths/deaths/tell-us-once

Do I need to choose a funeral director?

You do not have to use a funeral director but most people are reassured by their experience and expertise. The funeral director can make arrangements with us to collect your loved one's body and can manage the necessary documentation.

We ask that you tell us who you wish to use and to inform the chosen funeral director as quickly as possible of your intention to use them. You do not have to wait for the paperwork or to register the death to do this.

Many of our patients at the hospice have funeral plans in place. If you believe this to be the case, please tell a member of the nursing staff of your loved one's wishes.

Our hospice social work team can offer guidance and support around alternative options for funerals. They can also support with any funeral benefits you may be eligible to claim from the Department of Work and Pensions.

If you do not wish to use a funeral director you might find the following website useful:

- www.naturaldeath.org.uk

If funding the funeral is a concern for you, please see the following websites for advice and guidance:

- www.gov.uk/funeral-payments/overview
- www.citizensadvice.org.uk

In very exceptional circumstances when there are no relatives or friends willing and/or able to arrange and pay for the funeral, then the local council may take responsibility for arranging a Public Health Funeral. Please talk to one of our hospice social workers if you feel this may apply to your circumstances.

If you are unsure about any of the information included in this booklet, please speak to the ward staff, the hospice spiritual leads, hospice social work team or your GP surgery. Funeral directors are also very helpful and will be able to help you with what you need to do next.

Pilgrims Hospices support services

Pilgrims Hospices offer a range of bereavement support groups and one-to-one bereavement counselling.

If you would like to speak to someone about what might be helpful to you, your children or other members of your family, or if you would like to book an appointment with one of our counsellors, please contact our 24 hour advice line **01233 504 133** or email ph.pilgrimshospices@nhs.net

More information about our services can be found at www.pilgrimshospices.org





Find out more about
our work and other ways
you can support us.

Email: eastkent@pilgrimshospices.org

Visit: www.pilgrimshospices.org  [pilgrimshospices](https://www.facebook.com/pilgrimshospices)  [@PilgrimsHospice](https://twitter.com/PilgrimsHospice)

Our hospices:

56 London Road, Canterbury,
Kent CT2 8JA

Call: 01227 459700/812612

Hythe Road, Willesborough,
Ashford, Kent TN24 0NE

Call: 01233 504100

Ramsgate Road, Margate,
Kent CT9 4AD

Call: 01843 233920