

## Bereavement Department

# Hospital Post Mortem Examination - Information for Relatives

### Introduction

We appreciate that it can be difficult to think about a post mortem and these choices so soon after a death has occurred. This leaflet aims to provide you with the information and support you need, to decide whether to agree to a hospital post mortem examination of your relative.

It may be helpful to know as much as possible about the cause of death. A post mortem can only be undertaken with your permission (unless the examination has been ordered by the Coroner, please see Coroners Post Mortem Examination Information).

You have the right to know;

- What happens at a post mortem?
- The choices and limitation you may impose.
- The results you can expect.

You can talk to a doctor, nurse or one of our bereavement team about this. You may then like the time to talk with your partner, other members of your family, friends or religious leader.

If you decide that you do not want a full post mortem, you can consider more limited tests which can still provide valuable information. An external



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examination only can be undertaken if this is all you decide. This involves an external physical examination and / or photograph by a pathologist.

### **Why a Post Mortem is requested?**

It may reveal more precisely why your relative died and investigate more fully the underlying disease.

A lot can be learned from the post mortem examination with the overall aim of improving health care in the future by learning about the nature of the disease.

This is achieved by comparing the findings from the various tests carried out in life with the actual findings after death.

Post Mortems help to:

- Identify the cause of death
- Confirm the nature of the illness and/or the extent of the disease.
- Identify other conditions that may not have been diagnosed.
- Assess the effects of treatments/drugs and identify any complications or side effects
- It can help people understand why a loved one died
- Families or partners can ask questions that can only be answered with information from a post mortem examination.
- It is also possible that the information gained may benefit future children in the family, or other patients who suffer similar problems.

Many unexpected conditions are discovered at full post mortem examination and the information gained is vital in the advancement of medical procedures and our understanding of disease.

We would be grateful for your consent to a post mortem examination so that we may learn more about the underlying disease along with any other conditions present.

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However, even the most detailed post mortem investigations will often leave some questions unanswered.

### **What is a post mortem examination?**

A post mortem examination is the final step in the investigation of your relative's illness. It is a careful internal examination of a person who has just died and can give valuable information about an illness and its effects on the body.

The pathologist begins the post mortem with a careful external examination. The body will be opened and examined internally in detail. The organs are removed from the body one by one, weighed and an incision (cut) made in order to examine them inside as well as out.

Some people choose to donate tissue samples or organs from their relative's body for use in teaching or research, but unless you have given permission for this, the organs will be returned to the body before it is released.

### **Who will conduct the Post Mortem?**

Post mortem examinations are carried out by a pathologist, who is a Doctor specializing in the laboratory study of disease and diseased tissue (pathology). They are assisted by a Pathology Technician who is a person with specialist training to assist pathologists.

### **Where are they held?**

They are carried out in special facilities provided in the Hospital Mortuary. The body will be moved respectfully from the place of death to where the examination is to be carried out.

### **When will the post mortem be undertaken?**

Post mortems are carried out as soon as possible after death, the earlier the examination is held, the more likely it is to yield useful information. If for religious reasons you must have a funeral within 24 hours, please let the Hospital know.

## Patient Information

For further information our Bereavement Team will be happy to arrange a time to discuss any questions you may have on: Tel 024 7696 5835/5838/5834.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact our department and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

To give feedback on this leaflet please email [feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk](mailto:feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk)

### Document History

Department:	Bereavement
Contact:	25835
Updated:	July 2022
Review:	July 2025
Version:	1
Reference:	HIC/LFT/2682/22