

# Deceased Management Advisory Group

## UPDATE 14<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2020

The members of DMAG held a video conference on 14th April 2020, with representatives from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) in attendance. The following matters were discussed:

### 1. FINANCIAL RESILIENCE OF THE FUNERAL SECTOR

The MoJ is doing some work with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) examining the financial resilience of the funeral sector, in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of the questionnaire was to see what financial support might be needed by the sector. MoJ had drafted a questionnaire, which needed a response by noon on 15<sup>th</sup> April.

### 2. CLOSURE OF CEMETERIES

MoJ reported that the regulations were being reviewed, in the light of the lack of clarity in the existing regulations. The policy intention had been for the grounds of cemeteries and crematoria to be kept open, but for buildings to be closed except when funerals were taking place. The new draft regulations would be ready for Thursday 16 April, when the current regulations were up for their three-weekly review.

### 3. MODELLING

MoJ reported that there were no further details available. It was clarified that Office for National Statistics (ONS) data included all deaths where COVID-19 was mentioned on the Medical Certificate, and not just where COVID-19 was the cause of death.

### 4. FUNERAL DIRECTORS REFUSING TO COLLECT BODIES

NAFD and SAIF representatives confirmed that they had received no reports of funeral directors refusing to collect bodies.

### 5. GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE AND HELPLINE



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MoJ sought feedback from DMAG as to whether it would be helpful if all guidance was published in one central place, and whether a COVID-19 helpline should be established. DMAG felt that while it would be useful to have a central place for the publication of guidance, the helpline could prove problematic. All members of DMAG were currently offering guidance through FAQs etc. and dealing with numerous enquiries from members and the public.

### 6. TRENCH BURIAL

DMAG noted that the trench burials which had been carried out at a Muslim burial ground last week, in order that the burials could happen at a time in accordance with the Muslim faith, had led to some Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) to consider the need to plan for trench burials. This was alarming, and a misunderstanding of the context in which the aforementioned burials had occurred. DMAG's understanding of the capacity of burial space, was that there would not be a need for trench burials to occur for capacity reasons. MoJ would report back, and ask for a clear message from government to go to LRFs on this matter.

### 7. PPE

DHSC reported that further drops of PPE had been made to LRFs. There remained a shortage of body bags. NAFD and SAIF representatives reported that they had received concerning reports from members who were very low on PPE stocks.

### 8. PUBLIC HEALTH ENGLAND (PHE) GUIDANCE ON HANDLING THE DECEASED

Revisions to the guidance were being considered by New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG) later this week. This revised guidance may pick up on the matters raised by DMAG's letter to the Chief Executive of PHE of 3 April.



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## 9. VERIFIATION OF DEATH

DHSC that guidance on verifying death was to be released as a matter of urgency. It was hoped that this would address the inconsistent approaches being taken in different parts of the UK to this issue.

## 10. MICRO-PACEMAKERS

DMAG noted that, as the removal of micro-pacemakers required surgical intervention, it was not practical to remove them. They need not be removed for cremation as long as the manufacturer of the cremator confirmed this was the case.

## 11. ASHES RETENTION POLICY

DMAG approved a policy for the retention of ashes for publication on its website.

## 12. DIRECT CREMATION

A proposed addition to DMAG's guidance on attendance at funerals would be brought to tomorrow's meeting which covered ceremonies taking place outside of crematoria chapels.

