

Deceased Management Advisory Group

UPDATE 7th April 2020

The members of DMAG held a video conference, including representatives from the Ministry of Justice, with Judith Bernstein, Thibault Dufatel, Charlotte Spence-Jones, and from the Department of Health and Social Care, Jane Crossley. Richard Barradell was unable to attend the meeting, and Brendan Day had to leave early.

1. MoJ Matters

Judith Bernstein from the Ministry of Justice updated DMAG on:

Closure of Cemeteries – MHCLG are working on issuing Guidance as soon as possible

Numbers at funerals – the centre would be issuing a statement soon

Financial impact on funeral sector – MoJ will circulate questions for DMAG to consider. JL felt the impact would be long term and possibly permanent. MD will provide figures on private sector crematoria and local authority crematoria run by a private company.

The Group discussed the issue of families wishing to hold off on making funeral arrangements. The NAFD had received a complaint from a family as they felt the funeral director didn't have the authority to insist that arrangements are made quickly. SAIF has had enquiries from members about support in such matters. JD asked whether local authorities could use Section 46 of the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 and at what point after the death with no arrangements in place this would be deemed acceptable. JC will feed this back to Public Health England and DHCLG. JL pointed out that a local authority could go to the Secretary of State to switch on the powers in the Coronavirus Act 2020. DMAG will issue guidance to members on holding bodies.

The Group discussed the issue of ATI (Environment) UK. BD reported that ATI Industries France have purchased the UK company, but currently there is a legal hurdle to them trading in the UK. If this is overcome they may be able to support UK clients.

The Group discussed the issue that some hospitals are refusing to remove pacemakers and other implants from deceased people with Covid-19. This is leading to some funeral directors questioning why this is and whether they should also not be removing them. If implants are not removed, the family would be forced to have a burial rather than a cremation, which is unfair and would also increase pressure on burial space, which is in limited supply in some parts of the country. Guidance issued by the British Institute of Embalmers states it is safe to remove implants subject to using the correct PPE. The PHE Guidance doesn't mention the removal of implants. JC will ask if this can be included.



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The Group queried why PMART had been activated in London, and by whom. It would seem that this is a joint approach by the police and coroners service.

2. Catch Up from Previous Day

- Closure of Cemeteries – as above
- PPE – JC had circulated an email confirming that PPE would be distributed to LRFs for local distribution to key sectors, which would include funeral services. This is an initial drop, and regular supplies to keep LRFs topped up are being considered. The Group asked JC to confirm if the PPE is free of charge; if cemetery and crematorium workers are included in the funeral services category; if it applies to both England and Wales; if there are alternative contacts for areas where LRFs are not yet off the ground. JC will find out and feedback to the group. JC confirmed that body bags are not included in this round of PPE but were being looked at as a matter of priority.

3. Financial Support for Sector

This was put back to a future meeting when the questions to be circulated by the MoJ would be considered.

4. PPE Equipment

As 2 above.

5. Ashes Retention Policy

BD had drafted a policy on the retention of ashes during the crisis. This will be discussed further at tomorrow's meeting when the Group has had chance to read and consider the policy.

6. Cease Ritual Washing

The Group asked JC if the Government are likely to say that ritual washing of deceased people who die with Covid-19 must cease. It was felt that this is already covered in the PHE guidance and it was up to individual companies as to whether they offer it or not. This is leading to competition issues in some areas. It is likely to remain a matter for individual companies. The issue of revealing the Covid-19 status of deceased people to families and funeral professionals was raised; guidance will be sought from DHSC.

7. Article for Website

The Group welcomed the article by Debbie Kerslake, which would be placed on the website. MD is to ask Debbie if she could produce a one-page summary featuring the key messages. The Group will ask for other articles of interest from professionals and academics in the sector.

8. Items for Future Meetings with Cabinet Office/Scottish Government

JL will send the following agenda items to the CO on behalf of the Group:



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Modelling of Covid-19 spread and deaths
Duty of disclosure of Covid-19 status
PHE letter from DMAG – lack of response
Delay to funerals
DWP issues

JL will also send the proposed methodology for DMAG to monitor the time between death and the funeral to indicate pressure on services.

JL will speak for DMAG at the CO meeting on Thursday.

9. Data Collection and Research Options

To be discussed at a future meeting.

10. AOB/Round Robin

MD had circulated figures from the ONS on reported deaths from 2019 and 2020. These are broken down by NHS Trust area. The figures from the ONS are updated each Tuesday. MD will collate and circulate to the Group.

TT confirmed a representative from NI will join the DMAG meeting tomorrow. Representatives from the Welsh Government and from Public Health England will be invited to a future meeting.

AT reported that one coffin manufacturer had provided 12,000 coffins between March and April 2020, compared with 6000 in the same period in 2019. A Channel 4 programme last night had discussed how one funeral director has quadrupled their stock. AT confirmed there are plenty of coffins in the UK.

BD is to chair tomorrow's meeting.



FBCA
Federation of Burial
& Cremation Authorities



ICCM
Institute of Cemetery and
Crematorium Management



The Cremation Society