

# Deceased Management Advisory Group

## UPDATE 27<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2020

The members of DMAG held a video conference on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020, with representatives from the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), and Cabinet Office (CO) present for the open part of the meeting.

### 1. MINISTRY OF JUSTICE UPDATE

Members of DMAG were invited to provide feedback on the new webpage on the gov.uk website where all the relevant guidance on COVID-19 for those in the death management system could now be found. DMAG suggested a key word search facility would be useful, and that certain guidance needed to fall under more than one heading.

### 2. MHCLG UPDATE

MHCLG representatives responded to enquiries made by DMAG in advance of the meeting as follows:

#### *Local resilience forums (LRFs) requests of information*

DMAG had raised the issue that LRF information requests to funeral directors, crematoria and burial authorities had, in many cases, been onerous with daily requests for information being made. MHCLG explained the purpose of these requests, and confirmed that LRFs were making twice weekly reports to MHCLG. It was confirmed that, if LRFs were making daily requests, member organisations might suggest to the LRF that twice weekly responses would be made to align with the LRFs reporting back to MHCLG.

#### *COVID-19 as cause of death on death certificates*

MHCLG confirmed that the General Register Office (GRO) had confirmed that COVID-19 was an acceptable cause of death in its own right, but that 'possible' or 'probable' COVID-19 was not acceptable. MOJ would check that GRO had been communicated this to the BMA.



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## *PPE supplies through LRFs*

MHCLG confirmed that PPE supplies should be available to funeral directors, crematoria and burial authorities. The stock position was fast moving, and allocation was made on the basis of most urgent need.

MHCLG reported that a new online ordering service for PPE was to be rolled out shortly.

## *Funeral director use of temporary mortuaries*

MHCLG confirmed that funeral directors were permitted to use temporary mortuaries. If problems arose with this, and LRFs denied access to funeral directors, this should be raised with the MHCLG liaison officer.

## *Transfer of deceased persons from temporary mortuary to funeral directors*

MHCLG confirmed that there is no national protocol for transferring deceased persons from temporary mortuary facilities to funeral directors. Local protocols would apply, which would have to be inline with Public Health England (PHE) guidance. Any concerns about local protocols should be raised with the LRF and PHE.

## *Pandemic Multi-Agency Response Teams (PMART)*

MHCLG representatives confirmed that they were aware of DMAG's letter to the London Mayor. They understood that the body wrapping process, which was not ideal, had been used because body bags were not available. No complaints had been received by London Resilience about this process.

DMAG members expressed surprise that no complaints had been received by London Resilience, as DMAG members had received lots of concerns from their members about the process. There was also a lack of understanding as to why PMART had been activated in the first place, and a concern that it could be triggered elsewhere (e.g. West Midland) without there being a real need.



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DMAG would wait the response from the London Mayor to its letter, and a similar letter which it had sent to the Mayor of the West Midlands.

## 3. DHSC UPDATE

DHSC reported that revised PHE guidance on care of the deceased would be published shortly, as would DHSC guidance on the verification of death.

DHSC would pass on DMAG members' feedback on the bereavement support document, which had been published on the gov.uk website.

## 4. CO UPDATE

CO reported that a template was to be published which local authorities would use to gather information from those involved in the death management system should the additional powers in the Coronavirus Act for local authorities be triggered. CO would share the draft template with DMAG, for comments to be lodged by early Wednesday.

DMAG asked that clarification was given about the interaction between the Public Health Act 1984 and the Coronavirus Act, as at least one local authority had threatened to use powers of the former to intervene if families delayed funerals. CO would report back on this.

## 5. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

DMAG agreed it would keep notes of its meetings, but not formal minutes.

## DMAG CLOSED MEETING

### 1. ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS WITH CABINET OFFICE / SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

It was agreed that the main outstanding issue with Scottish Government was PPE supply.



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Cabinet Office was interested in capacity issues, and DMAG discussed how some further interrogation of the data it was receiving could be made to get a better understanding of where issues may be arising and how these were being dealt with. Some additional questions would be asked of funeral directors in the survey being undertaken where they reported that their storage was at full capacity and/or where there were lengthy periods of the deceased being held in their care. Where there were reports of lengthy lead times for crematoria or burial slots, these would be investigated to test their veracity and see what steps were being taken to address any issues.

DMAG noted that the Cabinet Office was doing its own 'deep dive' into certain areas, notably Hertfordshire, Merseyside, Devon and Cornwall.

## 2 AOB – ROUND ROBIN

DMAG members expressed their condolences to Miriam Deacon who had suffered a family bereavement. A card would be sent to Miriam from DMAG.



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**FBCA**  
Federation of Burial  
& Cremation Authorities



**ICCM**  
Institute of Cemetery and  
Crematorium Management



**The Cremation Society**