

Deceased Management

Advisory Group

Video Conference

4th May 2020

Notes

The members of DMAG held a video conference on Monday 4th May 2020, with representatives from the Cabinet Office (CO), Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC).

The following matters were discussed:

1. MOJ update

DMAG were asked to review 'the bereavement leaflet' that is pulled from the GOV.UK which DWP, DHSC and MOJ wished to edit.

The removal of implants was raised since the MOJ had heard concerns that hospital morticians were not removing implants which is the norm for hospital deaths. With deaths in the community many funeral directors with COVID-19 cases refrained from removing implants due to concerns for their staff (although PHE/BIE have advised this is possible under full infection control).

DHSC commented that hospital mortuaries may have restricted space due to the quantities of deceased being stored and that could be the same reason for funeral directors.

It was mentioned that micra heart implants did not need removing as the impact on combustion was minimal on the crematory, whereas thyroid implants are being investigated further.

DMAG to clarify with MHCLG and PHE whether there is a directive for hospital mortuaries to remove implants before releasing the deceased or another process put in place so next of kin are not denied a cremation funeral, if that is their wish.

2. CABINET OFFICE (CO)

The idea of an Online Portal for up to date Crematorium capacity initiated by ICCM & FBCA was discussed. It was requested that the portal should be independently moderated by the CO/MOJ, and that crematoria and funeral directors would have access to live information of capacity available across the UK.

ICCM to work on a scoping document.

SAIF raised the question of how will the government announce easement of the lockdown and that good notice is given to the funeral sector. The

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CO representative indicated that there would not be a radical change to the lockdown. It was firstly going to be a gradual process, rather than an unfettered easement, therefore, it will be gradual. Secondly, that physical distancing is going to be an ongoing feature for government rules including for funeral services, therefore, mourners numbers will be limited to space and size of the chapels. Thirdly, the Government would work on a clear communications strategy to be clear with the public and avoid delays to funerals.

As for church funerals, this was a decision of the Church of England and others not to permit these.

DMAG to invite representatives from the Churches Group on Funerals to discuss the opening up of religious places of worship.

APCC raised the matter of memorial services and the ICCM mentioned burial and scattering of ashes. The CO's view was that as long as capacity was available within the system for this would be decided locally on a case by case basis. However, the overriding principle during the crisis is that 'only essential services operate'.

3. DHSC Update

The subject of LRFs (local resilience forums) was mentioned and DHSC will take forward any concerns with blocks in the system for funeral directors. SAIF raised concerns about the supply of body bags in London and other matters which will be raised with DHSC offline.

APCC enquired that PPE was free of charge and the CO confirmed this, but PPE supplies were for emergencies only, mainstream sources should be pursued before using the LRF source.

Apparently, some LRFs have been charging and this should not occur. CO explained the only case for charging is allowing for distribution costs.

The NAFD asked when the latest PHE revised guidance is due for publication. DHSC advised that there were some changes over the weekend and the sign off process is ongoing.

4. Other Business

a) Funeral attendance post-lockdown

The FBCA proposed that we plan and agree together on proposals for a road map of good practice for crematoria, cemeteries and religious institutions as easements occur with the lockdown over the coming months.

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b) Body bags

The FBCA had put together guidance notes and this was agreed by all for publication. The FFMA advised that specification sheets for body bags would follow as well.

c) Memorials

The APCC advised that memorial suppliers have restocked and supplies to memorial masons are re-established.

Memorial applications are likely to be electronic and only available when staff resources permit.

ICCM advised that their website has local ombudsman guidance.

d) Articles for the DMAG website

DMAG agreed on publishing the Heather Conway and Catherine Betley articles.

e) DMAG to review what processes to retain

It was agreed DMAG would review what certification and registration processes could be retained post-COVID 19.

The next meeting is Wednesday 6th May which the ICCM will chair.

Welsh Government representative to be invited.

Churches group on funerals invited to attend next week.