

Deceased Management Advisory Group

Update 14th January 2021

The members of DMAG held a video conference on the 14th January, with representatives from the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), the Scottish Government (SG), Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive (NI) present for the 'Open' part of the meeting. The Cremation Society chaired the meeting.

DMAG Wider Consultation

1. Ministry of Justice (MOJ) update

1.1. MoJ reported no updates. They thanked DMAG members for the definitions of funeral operative provided. APCC queried whether anything else could be done to push the issue of vaccination for frontline funeral operatives, including cemetery and crematoria staff. MoJ confirmed there was nothing more they needed from DMAG members.

1.2. MoJ queried whether there was any experience of families delaying funerals. NAFD confirmed the main reason for families delaying funerals would be because of self-isolation but generally, there was no evidence that funerals were being delayed by families.

2. Welsh Government (SC) update

SC confirmed that the vaccination team were working to contact frontline funeral operatives, in line with the JCVI vaccination priority list. FBCA queried whether this included cemetery and crematoria staff. SC confirmed they would not be included as it was felt they were not dealing directly with the deceased or visiting private homes or care homes where the virus might be transmitted. FBCA stressed that burial and crematoria staff are in direct contact with mourners, as well as dealing with funeral directors, touching coffins, etc, which presented a real and obvious risk of infection. SC suggested FBCA provide an explanation as to the reasons they felt burial and crematoria staff should come within the definition of 'frontline funeral operatives' and this will be considered further.

SC requested in the meantime that funeral directors contact their local health board with a view to obtaining the vaccination. NAFD and SAIF confirmed that in England, they have already liaised with some health boards to provide them with members' details in order that health boards can contact them and could do the same for SC.



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APCC stressed the point that there are clear examples of crematoria staff being unable to work and crematoria being at crisis point. Multi-site operators have the ability to move teams around (although this presents its own risk) but if a crematorium closes due to lack of qualified staff, this will cause immediate problems. SC asked for examples to be provided so that this can be considered.

SG asked if SC would share their agreed list of eligible 'frontline funeral operatives' with them.

FFMA queried whether other Governments had seen the NI definition of 'frontline funeral operatives' which included 'Crematorium technicians; funeral director and crematorium staff who routinely clean those areas of their premises or vehicles used to transport the deceased that could lead to staff being exposed to viral infection' and queried why that was not being applied across the board. NI explained that their approach may differ due to the fact there was only one crematorium and therefore fewer numbers involved, as well as the fact that the chapel is currently closed to mourners so there was less risk of infection from mourners.

3. Scottish Government (SG) update

3.1.SG are in the process of drafting recommendations as to how the vaccine programme would be rolled out to frontline funeral operatives and would be liaising with the vaccination team to publicise this as soon as it is agreed. NAFD mentioned that they had received positive feedback from of their members in Fife who had received their vaccination but the concern is that they had only heard about it via a personal contact, and not through official sources. SG valued DMAG's contribution and would provide further details once finalised.

3.2.SG had issued a blog encouraging feedback from members of the funeral industry who operate small, independent, or rural funeral director businesses, on the draft Funeral Director: Code of Practice. CSGB confirmed they had tweeted the blog on both their own and the DMAG Twitter feed and would be including details in their monthly news review.

4. Northern Ireland Executive (NI)

NI confirmed a digital portal had originally been set up for health care professionals to use to register and book their vaccination. This would now be rolled out to frontline funeral operatives and a letter had been sent to those identified as being eligible. 458 individuals had made contact to date. NI were happy to share the details of their rollout with other administrations.



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5. Places of Worship (APCC)

APCC confirmed that it had heard that some vicars were beginning to close their churches so that no services would take place, including funeral services. SAIF confirmed they had received a letter from Essex County Council urging that churches be closed for worship services, but funeral services were permitted with limited numbers and no mingling afterwards. NI confirmed that churches in Northern Ireland had all agreed to close to funeral services.

DMAG Closed Meeting

1. Notes from previous meeting.

These were yet to be agreed but members would liaise with APCC with any amendments

2. Items for future meetings with Cabinet Office/Devolved Governments

ICCM expressed deep concern at the lack of mention of cemetery and crematoria staff at the Cabinet Office meeting and felt that 'frontline funeral operatives' seems to have been taken to include just funeral directors when there remained a real risk of infection to burial and crematoria staff. It was inconsistent that cemetery and crematoria staff had been included in the 'key worker' definition but now their importance seems to be being ignored. FBCA pointed out that there appeared to be a concentration on the numbers of deaths coming through but that if a crematorium has to close due to staff being infected, it does not matter whether the numbers are more or less than the average, the crematorium will be closed all the same and this will cause significant backlog, with a knock-on effect on funeral director and mortuary capacity.

APCC felt that the definition in the Green Book had really not helped when no thought had been given to defining 'frontline funeral operatives' more correctly and fully. SAIF suggested contacting the Welsh Government and Scottish Government to reiterate that NI have agreed a definition and that they ought to be adopt the same definition.

FBCA suggested that the APPG be used to contact relevant Ministers to raise this issue with them, referring them to the NI definition, stressing there was an urgent need for this to be looked at. It was agreed that ICCM, APCC and FBCA would meet tomorrow to discuss the response to SC. ICCM will draft a letter to Cabinet Office.



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3. AOB Round Robin

There were other no points raised.

The next meeting will be held on Monday 18 January 2021 with ICCM chairing the meeting.

