

Swindon and Marlborough
NHS Trust



Mortuary Viewing Policy

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| Sponsor: | Pathology Department |
| Consultation: | Coroner, Nursing Admin, Carillion |
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| Signed by Executive: | Deputy Director of Nursing |

SWINDON AND MARLBOROUGH NHS TRUST

MORTUARY VIEWING POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The mortuary facility at The Great Western Hospital is a public facility for use by the Trust, the local Council Authority and the Coroner. As such, the conditions of operation must take into account all users of the service and the regulation which govern them.
- 1.2. Wherever possible, should a viewing of any type be required, viewing should be undertaken before the deceased is transferred to the public mortuary or when the body is at the funeral directors. Once the deceased has been transferred to the mortuary, viewing will be by appointment only.
- 1.3. It will not be possible to cover all circumstances within this policy. Each case will be judged on its merit and in discussion with the mortuary staff.
- 1.4. An Officer of the Coroner includes all Police Officers acting on the behalf of the Coroner as well as the dedicated full time Coroner's Officers.

2. AIM

To ensure that relatives are offered the most compassionate and sympathetic surroundings for seeing a relative.

3. RATIONALE

- 3.1. It is accepted that the hospital/public mortuary is not the most appropriate place for viewing the deceased.

The purpose of this policy is therefore:

- 3.2. To clarify the circumstances in which the deceased may be viewed once they have been transferred to the mortuary.
- 3.3. To clarify the procedure for arranging viewings.

4. DEFINITIONS

4.1. Viewing for Identification

- 4.1.1. Required when the identity of the deceased is unknown. This will be on instruction from the Coroner, undertaken by a Coroner's Officer (who may be a police officer), with an individual who knew the deceased (most often a close relative).

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4.2. Viewing for Compassionate Reasons

- 4.2.1. When the next of kin require confirmation of an unexpected death as a way of helping with the grieving process (provided that this is not a coroner's case) or for strong religious beliefs.

4.3. Viewing for Tagging Purposes

- 4.3.1. Will occur only when the body has been transferred to the mortuary and found to be inadequately labelled.

5. VIEWING OF THE DECEASED

5.1. Compassionate/In Working Hours (0700-1600hrs)

- 5.1.1. If a patient dies on a hospital ward or in A&E, every effort should be made for the relatives to view the body before it is transferred to the public mortuary.
- 5.1.2. Except in extenuating circumstances, all compassionate viewings will be arranged through the Patient Services Office.

Once the patient is transferred to the public mortuary

- 5.1.3. Request is received from the next of kin to view the body.
- 5.1.4. Determine the classification of the deceased. Coroner or Non-coroner.
- 5.1.5. If the case is a non-coroner, encourage viewing at the funeral directors wherever possible as this will be easier and more flexible. If the viewing must take place at the hospital, an appointment must be made through the Patient Services Office.
- 5.1.6. Inform relatives that if the deceased is classified as 'Coroners' case, then viewing may only be by permission of the coroner. This will be arranged by the coroner's officer in conjunction with the Patient Services Office during normal working hours. An agreed appointment will be made.

5.2. Extenuating circumstances (non-coroner's cases)/Out of Working Hours (1600-0700hrs)

This will only be invoked outside of working hours. Examples of situations when this may become necessary are:

- Religious requirements
- Extreme, unassailable grief

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- 5.2.1. Notify 'on-call' manager.
- 5.2.2. Senior staff member will assess the situation and relevance.
- 5.2.3. Senior staff will contact the mortuary staff on stand-by to discuss the options.
- 5.2.4. The 'on-call' manager will notify relatives of the outcome.
- 5.2.5. Viewing agreed – with the mortuary staff
- 5.2.6. A time will be agreed with all parties for the viewing to take place.
- 5.2.7. A nurse, or a person with experience of dealing with the bereaved should escort relatives to the mortuary
- 5.2.8. A member of the security staff should accompany the nurse and relatives to the mortuary. It is the responsibility of the security staff to ensure that relatives are escorted safely to and from the mortuary.

6. ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

- 6.1. Appendix A – Viewing Policy Flow Chart

APPENDIX A

Viewing Policy Flow Chart

