

Alex Chalk MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
Ministry of Justice
102 Petty France
London
SW1H 9AJ

09 April 2020

Dear Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State,

I am writing to you about the measures now in place for certifying death during the COVID-19 pandemic and how these are impacting on GPs.

We wanted to thank you for all the work being done to make the changes needed to help frontline healthcare staff to combat the virus and are encouraged by the relaxing of many of the processes around certifying death. However, the omission of telephone consultation with either a doctor or a member of their multi-disciplinary team (including a paramedic or Advanced Nurse Practitioner) as a means of “attending” a patient in the 28 days before their death, is of great concern.

Telephone consultation within general practice is a widespread form of assessing and treating patients and is especially important in the current climate given that we are trying to restrict unnecessary contact. This practice will only increase in the foreseeable future. Although video consultation is used, telephone is by far the most straightforward and simple way of treating our patients at this time. This is especially true for older patients who are less likely to have the means or knowledge to use video.

Furthermore, if the patient has not been “attended” within the last 28 days before their death the doctor is required to view the body in person. This not only risks exposure but will also cause additional workload for GPs at a time when every doctor will be needed to treat the sick. We are also concerned that this will cause additional workload for coroners, and delays for grieving families, in cases where the doctor is unable to view the body and therefore the death is unreported.

We would therefore ask you to consider:

1. Including telephone calls as an acceptable form of “attending” the patient prior to death within the 28-day time limit.
2. Including senior members of the multi-disciplinary clinical team within the group defined as “attending” the patient.
3. Accepting video examination of the body after death where no one has attended the patient within 28 days.

Chief executive officer: Tom Grinyer



We feel these additional measures are important to avoid unnecessary risk and workload to GPs and coroners during this time, and to free up scarce resource for the benefit of the sick.

We look forward to your response and please do contact us if you wish to discuss anything further.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MSW', is enclosed in a light grey rectangular box.

Dr Mark Sanford-Wood
Deputy Chair GPC England

cc: Kevin Foster MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Future Borders and Immigration,
Home Office

Jo Churchill MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Prevention, Public Health and
Primary Care, Department of Health and Social Care