



**Management Summary of the Shipman Inquiry Third Report – Death Certification and the Investigation of Deaths by Coroners.**

**Key Changes:**

1. All deaths will be reported to the Coroner Service.
2. There will be far fewer inquests, as many coroner's investigations will end in a written report rather than an inquest.
3. There will be medical and legal (judicial) coroners. They will only perform the functions for which they are professionally qualified.
4. Coroner's Investigators will replace Coroner's Officers. The investigator's role will be much enhanced. They will specialise e.g. Some Officers would certify deaths and specialise in the investigation of causes of death, others would develop skills for the investigation of circumstances of death.
5. Two forms will be introduced. Form 1 will be an official record of the fact and circumstances of the death. Form 2 will be a brief summary of the deceased's recent medical history and the chain of events leading to the death.

The health professional or Coroner's Investigator who confirms the fact of death will complete Form 1. An experienced Doctor should complete form 2. A statutory duty to complete Form 2 will be placed on Doctors with more than 4 years experience.

6. Following a death a family member will be asked to attend the Coroner's Office, shown Form 1, asked about the deceased's medical history as detailed in Form 2 (though not shown Form 2 as it may contain confidential medical information). Assuming the family member raise no concerns the Coroners Investigator would certify the death. Registration can then take place on line from the Coroner's Office. If the family member raises any concerns then the death would be referred for further investigation by the Medical Coroner and where appropriate the Judicial Coroner.
7. There should be a reduction in the number of inquests. Inquests will only be held in a case where public interest requires a public investigation for reasons connected with the facts and circumstances of the individual case. There will only be a few categories where an

inquest is mandatory. The Judicial Coroner will produce a written report explaining how and why the deceased died where there is insufficient public interest to warrant an inquest.

8. The Medical Coroner will be responsible for investigating cases where there is a medical cause of death.
9. The Judicial Coroner will conduct inquests, the preceding investigations and direct the more complex investigations into the circumstances of death where an inquest was not envisaged.
10. Evidence suggests that there be under reporting of cases in which death was or might have been contributed to by medical error or neglect. It is believed that many Doctors oppose the idea of Coroners examining the possibility that medical error might have contributed to a death. In the future the Medical Coroner should examine any such cases. If it is found the allegation may have some foundation the case should be forwarded to the Regional Office for the Regional Medical Coroner to investigate.
11. There will be fewer coroners' autopsies due to the changes in investigating deaths.
12. There will be a systematic audit of every function in the Coroner Service.

**Structural Changes:**

1. There should be a national service, centrally governed and operating through regional and district offices. The new Coroners Service should be a body at arms length from the government, an Executive Non-Departmental Public Body (ENDPB). The services should be associated with both the Department of Constitutional Affairs and the Department of Health.
2. A board made up of the Chief Medical Coroner, Chief Judicial Coroner and Chief Coroner's Investigator will govern the Coroner Service.
3. The service will be organised on a Regional basis, coterminous with the Regional Government boundaries. Regions will be sub divided into District Offices.
4. The District Offices should be coterminous with the boundaries of 42 police areas. There will be more than one district office in police areas covering a large area or with a large population giving a total of 55 - 60 district offices.