

30 January 2023

## **Independent Medical Examiner Service**

**A recommendation of the Hyponatraemia Inquiry was the introduction of an Independent Medical Examiner office to scrutinise those hospital deaths not referred to the Coroner.**

**A non-statutory prototype Independent Medical Examiner service is now operating across all five Health and Social Care Trusts. This means that when a doctor completes a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death, an Independent Medical Examiner reviews the certificate together with the patient's clinical record and has a discussion with the certifying doctor about the circumstances of the death.**

**Can you tell me:**

**When did a medical examiner begin operating in your health trust?**

The Department of Health (DOH) Independent Medical Examiner (IME) service became operational within Belfast Health and Social Care Trust on 1 June 2021. The IME Service it is noted is not a 24-hour per day, 7 days per week service and was initially operational 3 days per week for deaths certified between Tuesday and Thursday, 8am to 4pm. The DOH IME service became a 5-day operational service for deaths certified Monday to Friday between the hours of 8am and 4pm from 28 February 2022.

**How many deaths has the medical examiner reviewed since taking up post in your health trust?**

The IME has reviewed a total of 907 deaths since the beginning of June 2021 until 30 November 2022.

**Of these deaths, how many times has the medical examiner decided to refer a case to the coroner, when the original certifying doctor had initially opted not to?**

Belfast Trust does not monitor this information but we can advise that the IME process involves a discussion between the Doctor and the IME with regard to the death during the times the IME Service is operational. The IME during these discussions, recommended a referral to the Coroner in 34 deaths. Belfast Trust advises there were discussions with the Coroner's Office in relation to all 34 deaths, with 28 deaths allocated a reference by the Coroner's Office. It is noted that none of these 34 deaths are linked to previous or future Coroner's Inquests at 19 January 2023.