Post-Mortem

Victim Support Scotland

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Post-Mortem

A post-mortem is a medical examination of a body after death. The purpose of the post-mortem is to establish the cause of death.

A post-mortem usually happens within 3 working days after the death. The examination is carried out by two specialist doctors, called pathologists. The examination takes place in a mortuary examination room which is similar to a hospital environment.

Why a Post-Mortem is Carried Out?

A post-mortem is carried out to ensure that all available evidence is gathered to help with the criminal investigation.

What to Expect

The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) have a legal responsibility to investigate all suspicious deaths. This means that you won't be asked to consent to the post-mortem examination.

Your Family Liaison Officer (FLO) will keep you updated on the progress of the post-mortem. If it is necessary to remove organs or tissue, the FLO will be able to tell you and discuss any concerns you have.

There may be more than one post-mortem examination. If this is necessary, you will be advised by your Family Liaison Officer (FLO) and the circumstances will be explained.

Next Steps

This certificate will be made available to the next of kin. Once they have received the certificate, COPFS will be ready to release the body for the funeral.

The final post-mortem report will be issued between 6 and 8 weeks following the examination. This report gives details of the medical examination and will, in most cases, give the cause of death. If the cause has death changed from what is written on the original death certificate, the next of kin will be informed by a letter from the Procurator Fiscal.

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