# How good are we at recording deaths and the causes of death?

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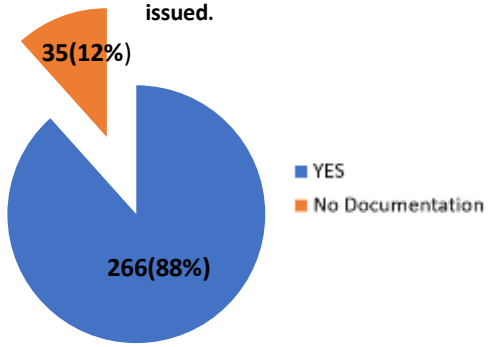
**Background.**
Timely and accurate completion of the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) is of great help to bereaved families as it reduces undue additional distress at an extremely difficult time[1]. Health Improvement Scotland's review of the MCCD in the 6 months to March 2020 showed that NHS Dumfries and Galloway performed poorly in relation to other health boards. 52 of 188 reviewed MCCDs (27.7%) were found to be 'not in order' requiring either an email amendment or a replacement MCCD.[2] Nationally, 21.2% of reviewed MCCDs were 'not in order' [3].

**Methods**
We reviewed the electronic case note of all patients who had died in Dumfries Infirmary between 1st February 2020 and 31st July 2020, excluding deaths referred to the Procurator Fiscal (PF). We assessed the quality of the documentation, the time taken to issue a certificate.

**Results**
301 patients died during the period of study and had not been referred to the PF. 265(88%) had clearly documented confirmation of death. 266 (88%) had a record in the notes indicating that an MCCD had been issued. The cause of death was documented in the notes in 247(82%) of cases. The identity of the doctor certifying the death and issuing the certificate was clear in 265 (88%) and 218 (72%) respectively. 273(79%) of MCCDs were issued within 2 working days. 70% of patients who died in CCU didn't have death confirmation record in the notes. It was not possible to review the MCCDs themselves because no copies were kept for scanning to the notes after forwarding to the Registrar.

**Figure 1: Is there a record that MCCD was issued.**



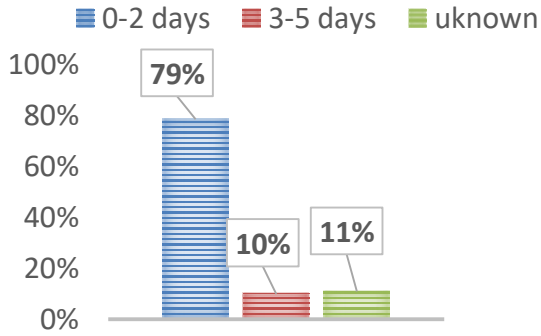
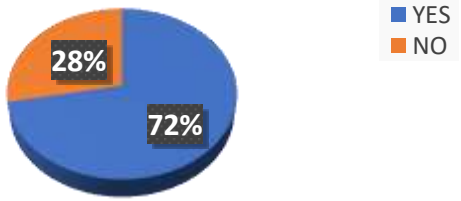




**Figure 2**: Delay in issuing certificate

**Figure 3: MCCD Signature available/ Certificate issuer known?**




**Discussion**
We knew already that a higher proportion of our MCCDs were 'not in order' when compared to other health boards. This audit has identified some additional serious failings in the way we confirm that death has occurred and record the cause of death in the notes. Performance is variable across the Infirmary with some units performing less than others.

**Next steps**
1.We have updated the steps required to record a death and complete an MCCD in the Handbook.


2.We recommend that all doctors do the Learn Pro module 'Death Certification: Identify Common Mistakes' as part of their mandatory training
3.We recommend the doctor completing the MCCD should email a copy to dg.scanningbureau@nhs.scot for uploading to Clinical Portal.

**References**
1.Guidance for doctors completing Medical Certificates of the Cause of Death (MCCD) and it's Quality Assurance. From the Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Catherine Calderwood. 21 September 2018.
2. Death Certification Review Service: 6 Monthly Review and NHS board inter comparative Data Report NHS Dumfries & Galloway.Health improvement Scotland.October 2019-March 2020
3.Healthcare Improvement Scotland 2020. Death Certification Review Service. Annual Report 2019 – 2020.