

# Policy and Procedures for Staff from Bereavement Services to Undertake Property Searches following the Death of an Adult Patient in Hospital

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## CONTENTS

Section	Page No
<b>1. Introduction and Overview</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Policy Scope</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Definitions and Abbreviations</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4. Roles</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>5. Policy Implementation and Associated Documents</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>6. Education and Training</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>7. Process for Monitoring Compliance</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>8. Equality Impact Assessment</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>9. Supporting References, Evidence Base and Related Policies</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>10. Process for Version Control, Document Archiving and Review</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	
Appendix One - Confirmation that the Deceased has no Known Next of Kin	<b>7</b>
Appendix Two - Procedures for Property Searches	<b>8</b>
Appendix Three - Property Search Form	<b>11</b>
Appendix Four - Property Search Letter (printed on UHL letterhead paper)	<b>13</b>

### REVIEW DATES AND DETAILS OF CHANGES MADE DURING THE REVIEW

- References to the “Head of Chaplaincy and Bereavement Services” have been updated to “Head of Learning from Deaths”
- References to the “Chief Nurse” have been updated to “Medical Director”
- 2.2 was updated to include all Bereavement Services staff
- 4.3 Police/ Community Support Officer, omitted from property searches throughout the policy
- 5.1 brackets added to ‘appendix two’
- 7 reporting of audit updated
- Appendix one – 1 full title used of NDF
- Appendix two – 4(5)Police removed
- Appendix two – 5(1) I-phone added
- Appendix two -/7(1) 7.(2) 7(3) – process updated
- Appendix four – office hours amended
- Keywords – Common Grave added

### KEY WORDS

Property search, Next of Kin, Funeral, Intestate, Pauper’s Funeral, Common Grave, No Will, No Family

## 1 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

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- 1.1 When a person dies in hospital without known relatives, Bereavement Services need to confirm that they have made all reasonable efforts to trace anyone who might be related or can give information about relatives. This is a requirement of Department of Health Guidelines (1992) and may include family announcements in the local newspaper, contacting neighbours and undertaking property searches. The Trust is also able to use the Leicestershire Police database to assist in locating relatives.
- 1.2 The Policy has been reviewed by the Senior Bereavement Officer and Head of Learning from Deaths in consultation with the UHL Head of Legal Services, Leicestershire Constabulary and Internal Audit.
- 1.3 All information obtained from a property search will only be used for the purpose of contacting next of kin or friends prior to arranging a funeral or informing third parties such as banks, insurance or utility companies of the deceased (so that accounts can be closed or the cost of a funeral can be recouped by the Trust) or contacting the Treasury Solicitor who will administer the estate of the deceased (a process that is not undertaken by the Trust).

## 2 POLICY SCOPE

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- 2.1 This policy applies to adult patients with no known next of kin who die on any ward or department (including the Emergency Department and Alliance beds) in UHL. The policy for arranging a hospital funeral is the same whether the estate of the deceased is solvent or insolvent.
- 2.2 This policy and procedures apply to all Bereavement Services staff

## 3 DEFINITIONS & ABBREVIATIONS

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### 3.1 Next of Kin

For the purposes of this policy this refers to a blood relative or a person known to have been nominated by the deceased patient to act as Next of Kin.

## 4 ROLES

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**4.1 The Executive lead for this policy is the Medical Director**, delegated to the Head of Learning from Deaths who will oversee the implementation and compliance of this policy and for monitoring overall compliance with the Policy.

**4.2 Head of Learning from Deaths is responsible for:**

- Ensuring that the Senior Bereavement Services Officer and Bereavement Services Officers have the appropriate skills and training to undertake property searches in accordance with the Policy
- Undertaking a monthly review of the Bereavement Services Database and Property Search Record Book to ensure that accurate record keeping of each search is being maintained.
- Reviewing the Policy at regular intervals, no more than three years apart (or earlier in response to changes in Treasury Solicitors guidelines). The policy will also be reviewed in conjunction with the Head of Legal Services where appropriate.

**4.3 Senior Bereavement Services Officer is responsible for:**

- Overseeing the arrangement of Property Searches in accordance with the policy.
- Determining the need for a Property Search to take place. They are responsible for organising and undertaking a property search and liaising with the Housing Association Representatives or Landlords who will act as witnesses to the search.
- Liaising and reporting to Head of Learning from Deaths

#### 4.4 Bereavement Services staff are responsible for:

- Adhering to the procedures within this policy.

### 5 POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

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- 5.1 Bereavement Services staff must follow the following procedures for Undertaking Property Searches as set out in the text and appendices of this Policy to ensure the following:
- a) Confirmation that the deceased patient has no known next of kin (Appendix One)
  - b) Ensuring that Property Searches only take place when the conditions in (Appendix Two) are met
  - c) Accurately documenting all Property Searches (Appendix Three)
  - d) Leaving prominent notification in the property that a search has taken place (Appendix Four)

### 6 EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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- 6.1 The policy will be incorporated into staff induction programme for Bereavement Services.
- 6.2 A copy of the Policy will be taken by the Bereavement Officers to each Property Search and will be made available to Landlords, representatives of Housing Associations and any other third parties who may represent the deceased.

### 7 PROCESS FOR MONITORING COMPLIANCE

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#### Policy Monitoring Table

Element to be monitored	Lead	Tool	Frequency	Reporting arrangements
Sufficient efforts are made to locate Next of Kin or friends of the deceased prior to the property search	Senior Bereavement Services Officer	Bereavement Services Database Property Search forms	Per search	Monthly report to Head of Learning from Deaths
Number of Property Searches that take place	Senior Bereavement Services Officer	Bereavement Services Database Property Search forms	Annual	Monthly report to Head of Learning from Deaths
Quality of documentation of Property Searches	Senior Bereavement Services Officer	Bereavement Services Database Property Search forms	Per search	Monthly report to Head of Learning from Deaths
Any staff safety issues that arise from a Property Search	Senior Bereavement Services Officer	Feedback from staff undertaking the search	Per search	Datix form completed where appropriate

### 8 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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The Trust recognises the diversity of the local community it serves. Our aim therefore is to provide a safe environment free from discrimination and treat all individuals fairly with dignity and appropriately according to their needs.

As part of its development, this policy and its impact on equality have been reviewed and no detriment was identified.

## **9 SUPPORTING REFERENCES, EVIDENCE BASE AND RELATED POLICIES**

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- 9.1 *When a patient Dies* (2015), Department of Health (Gateway ref: 5578)
- 9.2 Referring Cases to the Treasury Solicitor (BV) (2008) Treasury Solicitors: *A guide for local authorities and hospitals*.
- 9.3 UHL Policy (2010) *Management of Patients Property - Policy and Procedures* (B24/2007)

## **10 PROCESS FOR VERSION CONTROL, DOCUMENT ARCHIVING AND REVIEW**

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- 10.1 Once this Policy has been approved by the UHL P&G Committee, Trust Administration will allocate the appropriate Trust Reference number for version control purposes.
- 10.2 The updated version of the Policy will then be uploaded and available through INsite Documents.
- 10.3 This Policy will be reviewed every three years.

# Confirmation that the Deceased has no Known Next of Kin

Confirming whether the deceased patient has any known next of kin	
<b>1</b>	The UHL Notification of Death Form and Bereavement Care Check List (NDF) that is completed by ward staff following a patient's death should confirm details of next of kin and this sent to Bereavement Services with the patient's notes and property.
<b>2</b>	<p>If the NDF indicates that there is no next of kin and no family or friends of the deceased has contacted the Bereavement Services after 5 working days, investigations will begin in order to trace the deceased next of kin (or other family or friends) by the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Bereavement Services will read and check through the medical notes for any relevant information regarding contact. Staff may need to request "old" case notes just in-case different information has been previously recorded.</li> <li>b) Bereavement Services will check with the Ward staff if the deceased had any visitors or talked about their next of kin.</li> <li>c) Bereavement Services will contact anyone (usually friends / neighbours) listed in the notes to seek more information. For example, next of kin details, place of birth, occupation or if the deceased discuss making a Will.</li> <li>d) Bereavement Services should contact any other agency who may hold information. For example, Residential/nursing home, GP surgery, Housing Officer, Council Finance Officers, Social Workers.</li> <li>e) Bereavement Services may place a notice in the main body of the Leicester Mercury. If the deceased's place of birth is known and it is outside of Leicestershire, an announcement may also be included in the main body of the newspaper of the relevant locality. Announcements should state that person / persons should contact Bereavement Services at the relevant hospital.</li> </ul>
<b>3</b>	Any information discovered in relation to the next of kin must be recorded in the Bereavement Services Database.
<b>4</b>	If after 10 working days after the start of the investigation no next of kin is identified and contacted a property search may be undertaken as appropriate.

# Procedures for Property Searches

## Appendix Two Policy and Procedures for Staff from Bereavement Services to Undertake Property Searches Following the Death of an Adult Patient in Hospital

1. Introduction / Scope	
1	This procedure is to be followed by all Bereavement Services Staff involved in, or organising a property search following the death of an adult patient in hospital.
2. Timing of Property Searches	
1	Whenever a patient dies in the hospital, all reasonable attempts will be made to contact next of kin prior to dealing with the estates of deceased patients as outlined in Appendix One. Searches are only carried out only after thorough checks have been made in accordance with the procedures in Appendix One but have not yielded any results after 10 working days from when the investigations in Appendix One were commenced. Bereavement Services must have access to house keys in order to do a property search as properties must not be forcibly entered. If there are no keys then Bereavement Services must refer the case to the Treasury Solicitor as appropriate.
3. Purpose of Search	
1	Bereavement Services staff will search for items (such as a will) that give information on the deceased person's wishes regarding the funeral and names of possible relatives or friends who can be contacted to establish who will be arranging and paying for a funeral. In the case of no such person(s) Bereavement Services staff will also look for evidence of bank accounts from which the cost of the funeral can be reclaimed by the Trust.
4. Precautions to be taken when undertaking a search	
1	Staff from Bereavement Services will inform the Head of Learning from Deaths (or the Senior Bereavement Services Officer in their absence) of the need to undertake a search.
2	For the protection of staff, the address of the property, time of visit and estimated time of departure from the property search must be communicated to Bereavement Services staff remaining on site. Staff undertaking the search must also be contactable at all times during the visit (ie have a mobile phone contact number in-case emergency contact is required).
3	Protective clothing must be worn (supplied by Bereavement Services). Staff should not put themselves at risk at any time and therefore if the property poses a potential danger or health hazard to members of staff (eg presence of sharps, sitting tenants) then a search must not be undertaken.
4	Two members of the Bereavement staff must enter the property together accompanied by one of the following as an independent witness: landlord or local housing authority representative. The independent witness should be the first one who enters the property and the last to leave. Rooms must be searched one at a time by Bereavement Services Staff with the witness overseeing the search. The witness should not search.
5	Property owned by the deceased:  Keys to the deceased patients property should be kept by Bereavement Services (in the office safe) until confirmation is received on who is administering the estate of the deceased. If the keys are required for an initial or subsequent property searches they

	<p>should be signed out by two people from Bereavement Services.</p> <p>Council Owned Property / Housing Association / Landlord:</p> <p>Keys to the deceased patient's property should be returned to the landlord, council or housing association representative on completion of the property search. Those persons will also be responsible for securing the property following the search.</p>
<b>5. Removal of Items from Property</b>	
<b>1</b>	<p>Items (with the exception of cash over £50) should not be removed from the property. If important information is found that would help to confirm next of kin, Bereavement Services staff must write the details down or take a photograph of the item rather than removing any written evidence (eg wills, address books). A work I-phone is held within Bereavement Services and is the only appliance that should be used for this task.</p>
<b>2</b>	<p>Financial documents - Full details of all financial documents found during the property search should be taken in photographic or written form. Details should be recorded on the property search form (Appendix Three) taking account of available UHL guidance regarding the maintenance of records relating to patient's property. Where documents are found relating to accounts with financial institutions, the record should detail the sort code, account number and name of the institution. Insurance policy details to be documented should include the name of the insurance company and the policy number. If bank cards are identified, only the details on the front of the card should be documented or photographed.</p>
<b>3</b>	<p>Items of value, for example jewellery, must be left where they are found.</p>
<b>4</b>	<p>On the advice of Leicestershire Constabulary, cash over £50 must be removed by the Bereavement Services Staff (and logged on the Property Search Form). This cash must be banked at the UHL Cashiers' Office as soon as possible. The receipt should be attached to the House Search Form and given to the Head of Learning from Deaths (or the Senior Bereavement Services Officer in their absence).</p>
<b>5</b>	<p>A Property Search Letter should be completed on completion of the search by the Bereavement Services Officer (Appendix Four). This is to inform anyone who has rightful access to the property that a search has taken place. The letter should be left in a visible position inside the property.</p>
<b>6. Documenting the Property Search</b>	
<b>1</b>	<p>The property search must be fully documented on the Property Search Form which is a carbonated triplicate form used to document the actions and events of the property search. The three carbonated copies must be completed and signed during the house search and distributed as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 x the original top copy to the Head of Learning from Deaths</li> <li>• 1 x copy to Witness</li> <li>• 1 x copy to Patient's Hospital Funeral File</li> <li>• 1 x copy to remain in the Property Search Book</li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	<p>Items recorded on the form should be described in full and in line with guidelines on describing valuables in the 'UHL Management of Patients Property – Policies and Procedures' (2010). All individuals present during the search (UHL staff / local authority / housing association) must sign to confirm that no items were removed from the property, other than those detailed on the form and that the property was secured on exit.</p>
<b>7. Transfer of information / I-phone images obtained following the property search</b>	



1	If I-phone images were taken during the search, both Bereavement Services Officers who were present at the search should seal the I-phone in a SmartSafe secure bag and write the secure code printed on the bag onto the Property Search Form (the SmartSafe bag must only be used for the camera and no other valuables must be placed in the bag).
2	The I-phone still sealed in the SmartSafe secure bag should be presented to the Head of Learning from Deaths (or the Senior Bereavement Services Officer in their absence) for the downloading of photographic images to a named folder (House Search Images) This folder is specifically for images and can be located on the Bereavement Drive (J) . The secure code must be checked against the record on the Property Search Form. The bag must be opened and the download of the images performed in the presence of one of the Bereavement Services Officers who undertook the search. The images should be cross-matched to the details recorded on the property search form in order to ensure that all documented accounts have been photographed. The images should be securely deleted from the I-phone.
3	The Bereavement Services Officer and Head of Learning from Deaths (or the Senior Bereavement Services Officer in their absence) should sign a declaration on the property search form to confirm that they were present when the images were downloaded and that the images fully correspond to the details recorded on the Property Search Form.

a) Name of Deceased (Addressograph):

b) Property Address:

c) Date of Search:

From: To:

d) Duration of Search:

e) Names of UHL staff conducting the search:

Name	Designation

f) Names of independent witness:

Name	Designation & Police No (if applicable)

g) The first person who entered the property was:

PRINT NAME:

h) Cash removed (list below)

Amount of Cash	Total
Coins	
£5 x	
£10 x	
£20 x	
£50 x	
TOTAL CASH REMOVED	

Copies to:-  
1x Head of Bereavement Services  
1x Deceased File  
1x Witness  
1x Remain in Property Search Book

i) The following photographs were taken at the house. For photos relating to accounts with financial institutions, detail the sort code, account number and name of the institution. Photos and documentation of Bank Cards must include the details on the front of the card but not the security number on the rear of the card. Insurance policy details to be documented should include the name of the insurance company and the policy number.

Full Description of Item	Reason for Photo	Photo cross-matched on Network Drive Signed by both Bereavement Services Officers and Head of Chaplaincy and Bereavement Services for the Assistant Director of Nursing)

j) Was a will found?

YES / NO

k) The last person to leave the property was:

PRINT NAME:

l) Signed by:

PRINT NAME(S):  
1.   
2.   
3.

m) The person who retained the keys was:

PRINT NAME:

n) Cash detailed above was banked at the Cashiers Office by: (N.B. attach receipt to copy for Head of Chaplaincy & Bereavement Services)

PRINT NAME:

o) Declaration to be signed following the downloading of images of property onto the UHL Bereavement Services Hospital Funeral Database.

p) We the undersigned confirm that the images downloaded from the camera fully correspond to information recorded on the Property Search Form.

**Head of Chaplaincy and Bereavement Services**

Name & Designation  
Signature: Date:

**Bereavement Services**

Name & Designation  
Signature: Date:

**Bereavement Services**

Name & Designation  
Signature: Date:

# Property Search Form

## Appendix Three Policy and Procedures for Staff from Bereavement Services to Undertake Property Searches Following the Death of an Adult Patient in Hospital

Notes:

- The Medical Director should only sign the form in the absence of the Head of Learning from Deaths.

**Property Search Letter  
(printed on UHL letterhead paper)**



University Hospitals  
of Leicester  
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**Appendix Four**  
Policy and Procedures for Staff from Bereavement  
Services to Undertake Property Searches  
Following the Death of an Adult Patient in Hospital

**N.B. THIS IS A SAMPLE PROPERTY SEARCH LETTER**

**To whom it may concern**

Date:

Following the death of \_\_\_\_\_ in hospital, his/her property has been searched for evidence of a will and next-of-kin.

If you have any queries about the search please contact the Bereavement Services Office at \_\_\_\_\_ hospital. The phone number is:

<b>Leicester Royal Infirmary</b>	0116 258 5194 or 5196	Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 4:30pm
<b>Leicester General Hospital</b>	0116 258 4235 or 4236	Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 4:30pm
<b>Glenfield Hospital</b>	0116 258 3401 or 3017	Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 4:30pm