

Tony Townsend, GP, Whangamata

A few months ago I was called to a sudden collapse. The patient was a man in his late 40s. He had no cardiac activity and after 20 minutes of life support, with no shockable cardiac rhythm, resuscitation attempts were stopped. I was asked by the police, who were called to the scene, if I knew what had caused the man's death and whether I would be prepared to talk to the duty Coroner about completing a death certificate.

I related this story to the duty Coroner in the presence of the policeman involved and the Coroner thought that I could complete a

Two days later the Funeral Director asked me if I would complete a Cremation Certificate. Although I am allowed to complete a Death Certificate if I have not attended a patient during their last illness, the same does not apply to a Cremation Certificate.* This created a dilemma. It appeared that nobody was quite sure of how to proceed. As I had issued a Death Certificate this was not a Coronial Case, but as I had not signed a Cremation Certificate, the body could not be cremated.

This prolonged delay was not only frustrating for all of those involved, it was devastating for the family, who had not only lost a loved one but

Advice for medical practitioners

The Chief Coroner, Judge Neil MacLean has indicated that, in conjunction with the Ministry of Health, he is about to begin the process of examining what changes may be needed to the Cremation Regulations 1973 and The Burial and Cremation Act 1964 and possibly The Births Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1955 to align them better with the new Coroners Act 2006.

I am grateful to Chief Coroner, Judge Neil MacLean for his comments regarding this communication.

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