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Gillian Martin MSP, Convenor  
Health, Social Care and Sport Committee  
[hscs.committee@parliament.scot](mailto:hscs.committee@parliament.scot)

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29 January 2022

Dear Convenor,

I am writing to provide an update on the reviews of Medical Certificates of Cause of Death (MCCD), undertaken by the Death Certification Review Service (DCRS).

As you will be aware from previous correspondence to the Committee on this topic, DCRS was established by the Certification of Death (Scotland) Act 2011. One of its key functions is to review a random selection of MCCDs in Scotland. Under normal circumstances, 10% of all eligible MCCDs are randomly selected for a Level 1 review<sup>1</sup>, 2% are selected for a Level 2 review<sup>2</sup>, with approximately an additional 2% made up of interested person reviews<sup>3</sup>.

This update follows the previous letters sent to the Committee including on 5 July 2021 and 25<sup>th</sup> October 2021. The letter I sent to the Committee on 5 July 2021, highlighted that from 10 May 2021 DCRS had returned to pre-pandemic, standard levels of reviewing MCCD. This was a positive step, and reflected the improved situation on the ground with respect to hospitalisations and deaths at that time.

In the letter from the 25<sup>th</sup> October 2021, I alerted you that to balance the burden on certifying doctors while maintaining necessary scrutiny, we reverted to an adjusted schedule of MCCD reviews on the 4<sup>th</sup> October 2021. In discussion with DCRS, National Records of Scotland (NRS), and officials from across the Scottish Government, including primary care and unscheduled care, we decided that 8% of eligible MCCD would be randomised for review. Officials have continued to review available data (e.g. excess deaths, and hospitalisation and ICU numbers) every two weeks and as appropriate increased the review rate and in agreement with DCRS.

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<sup>1</sup> Level 1 reviews involve checking the MCCD and a discussion with the certifying doctor

<sup>2</sup> Level 2 reviews involve an additional, more detailed review of the clinical information surrounding the death and the MCCD.

<sup>3</sup> An interested person can apply to DCRS for a review of an eligible MCCD.

On 29 November 2021, officials and DCRS agreed that 10% of eligible MCCDs would be randomised for review.

In December 2021, DCRS advised officials that the continued rise in COVID-19 related workload was leading to certifying doctors having increased demands on their time and once more were difficult to contact as part of the review process. In addition, the demands on DCRS also increased significantly, including an increase in calls to the service from certifying doctors. The impact of DCRS continuing to operate at 10% service levels was assessed to be overly burdensome on front-line doctors delivering care to patients and the pressure on the NHS appeared unlikely to ease over the Christmas and New Year period. Therefore, reviews were reduced to 8% from the 29<sup>th</sup> December 2021. The DCRS enquiry line for doctors, Interested Person Reviews and repatriations have continued as normal.

Since the 29 December change, officials have continued to review available data (e.g. excess deaths, and hospitalisation and ICU numbers) biweekly. Officials' most recent review of available data alongside consideration of current DCRS caseload has informed our decision, in agreement with DCRS, to return to a rate of 10% hybrid reviewing.

This change came into effect on Monday 24 January 2022. Interested Person Reviews and applications for repatriation where the deceased died abroad but is to be buried or cremated in Scotland will continue and if pre-pandemic levels are expected this would add approximately 2% to the review levels.

The situation will continue to be reviewed biweekly in case there are any changes required.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maree Todd', written in a cursive style.

**Maree Todd MSP**