

Inquest Guide for Witnesses

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- After the Coroner has asked all his or her questions, the family or their legal representative can ask questions. Lawyers for other interested persons can then ask questions. If there is a jury, each member of the jury can also put questions to the witness. The Coroner will ensure that no inappropriate questions are asked. Lastly, your organisation's own legal representative can ask you questions. These questions are usually intended to elicit any important details that have not yet been given in evidence, or to clarify matters arising out of previous questioning.
 - Once you have given your oral evidence, the Coroner will usually release you. At this point, take a seat and wait until the next natural break to leave the courtroom, if you wish to do so before the end of the inquest. If you are not formally released, you will need permission from the Coroner before leaving the court, as the Coroner may need to ask further questions of you (after hearing evidence from other witnesses).
 - The inquest will take place in a public court. Anyone can attend and journalists can generally print what they hear in court. Photographs are not allowed within the court building. A reporter from local media or television may approach you at the end of the inquest and they can take photographs outside the court building, although this is relatively unusual. If you are approached by the press, your organisation should have prepared a press statement and you should refer the press to the communications team, if possible.

Section 4: Court day checklist

- Plan your journey and plan to arrive early.
- Dress smartly (as though you are attending a job interview).
- Be prepared. Familiarise yourself with your statement, the medical records, investigation report and any other relevant documents in advance of the inquest, including relevant local and national policies and guidance.

tell the truth. Both carry the same weight. Once you have taken the oath or affirmation, the uppermost thing in your mind should be giving an answer that is truthful.

- Some Coroners will ask you to read out your witness statement and other Coroners will ask you questions based on what you have written in your statement.
- Give a full, straightforward and factual account. Do not speculate or guess. Share the story of what happened logically, and from beginning to end in plain English.
- Take your time, concentrate, speak clearly and slowly.
- Call the Coroner Sir or Ma'am / Madam.
- Be honest, helpful, professional, and compassionate.
- Listen to the question and only answer that question.
- Do not try to predict the next question.
- Do not attempt to fill any silences.
- Allow your legal representative or the Coroner time to interrupt if you think an inappropriate question has been put to you.
- Avoid medical jargon. Explain medical terminology to assist the court and to help those attending to understand.
- Ask for clarification if you do not understand the question.
- If you do not remember something, then say so. Do not guess or speculate. Do not be afraid to answer a question with 'I do not know/cannot remember'. If you need to refer to the clinical records in order to answer a question, then do so.
- If you feel the question asked is outside of your expertise, then you should state this clearly. You should say something like, "I am afraid that I cannot answer that question, it is outside the area of my expertise".
- If asked a question in a confrontational manner, do not become defensive. Answer as calmly and as simply as possible.
- Address your answers to the Coroner.
- NHS Resolution has produced a useful film to demonstrate how a clinician may present evidence in court, and what a well-prepared witness looks like. You can watch this [here](#).

Section 6: Giving evidence remotely

- You may be permitted by the Coroner to give your evidence remotely, via Teams or a similar platform. You can watch our mock inquest training video [here](#), which recreates an inquest where the family and witnesses are participating remotely.
- The same rules apply whether attendance is in person or remote. By joining via video link, your video room becomes an extension of the court room. You must treat the remote hearing as seriously and formally as you would if you were in court and follow all rules of court etiquette.
- Dress smartly (as though you are attending a job interview).

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- The room you give evidence in should be quiet, private and secure and all doors should be closed.
 - Steps should be taken to ensure that you will not be interrupted during the inquest. For example, it would be appropriate to place yourself on “DO NOT DISTURB” and for a clearly worded note to be displayed on the door that states “DO NOT ENTER – INQUEST HEARING IN PROGRESS”.
 - Test your internet connection in advance to ensure you have access to all systems and documentation you will need during the inquest (especially if you will be attending remotely from home or off site).
 - You will need to be on video when called to give your evidence. At all other times (e.g. during breaks or when others are giving evidence) you will be asked to mute your audio and switch off video.
 - If you encounter a technical issue, do not panic! Just let the Coroner or your legal representative know as soon as possible.
 - For further guidance on giving evidence remotely read our checklist [here](#).

Section 7: Inquest conclusions

- At the end of the evidence, the Coroner (or jury, if there is one) will make findings of fact and will return a **conclusion**.
- The following are examples of **short form conclusions**:
 - Natural causes
 - Accident
 - Misadventure
 - Suicide
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