

Responding to an unexpected death

Getting it right

How an organisation responds to an investigation into a death will have a huge impact on families, your staff, your community; the public and your organisation. It is vital you respond appropriately. It affects how your stakeholders, regulators, collaborative partners, politicians, coroners, the media, families and the public will respond. We help you to get it right. Have you taken the necessary action? Are you open to criticism?

Supporting you from start to finish

Risk assessment and your action plan following death.
Advising on contact with families
Liaison with coroner, police, HSE, other regulators and stakeholders
Evidence-giving support for your staff
Online witness support resources
Advocacy and support at hearings
Showing appropriate transparency
Conducting investigations
Managing the media
Identifying and resolving potential claims
Dealing with prevention of future death reports

Let us help you manage the process

Manage the process smoothly. Working with you to be sure everything is covered and your organisation provides a competent and proper response.

Reducing impact and costs. We look ahead for risks and deal with them early, reducing the impact on your organisation and minimising costs.

Reputation and media. Helping you cope with media and communications with other stakeholders to protect your organisation and people.

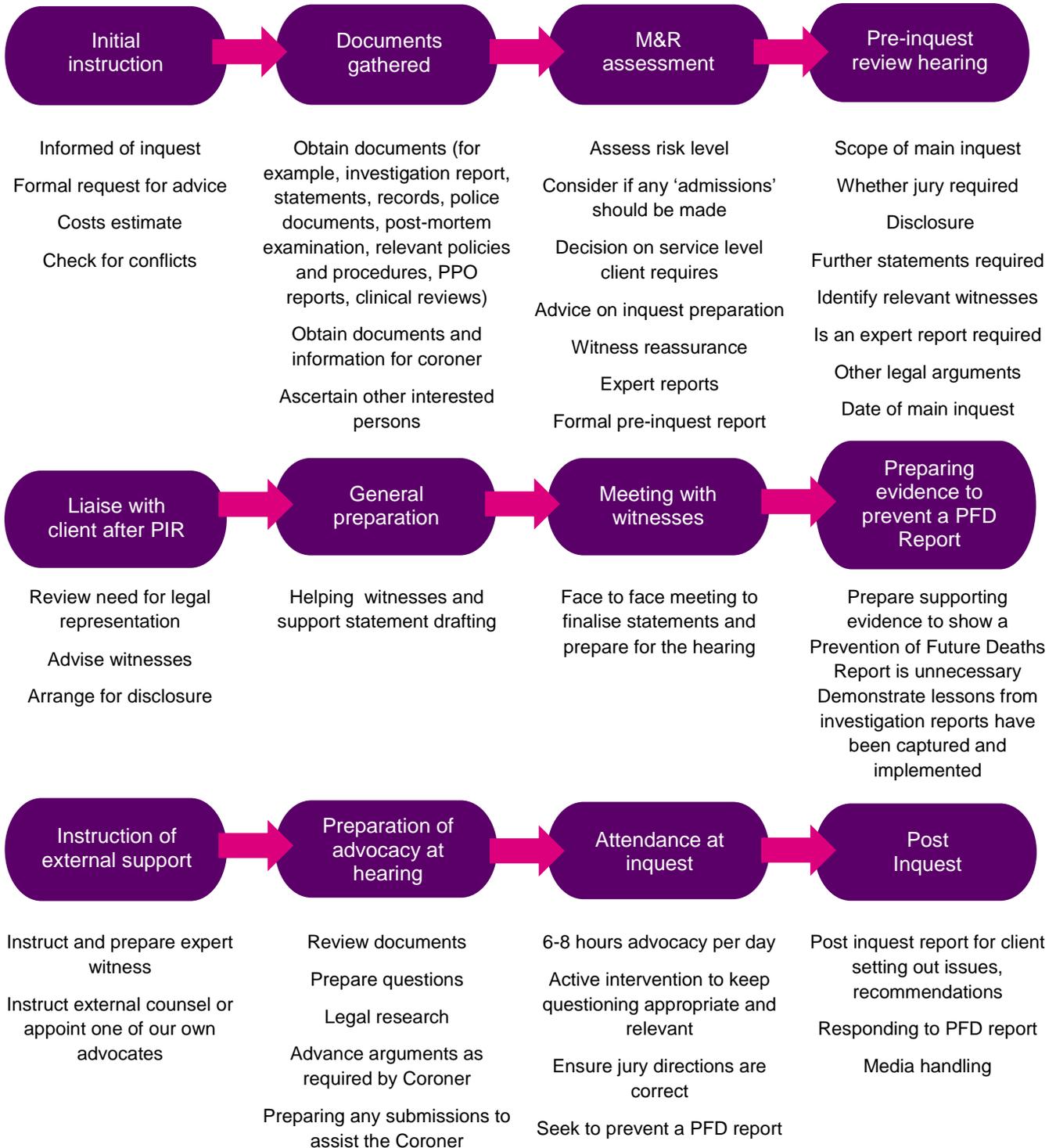
Prevention of future deaths. Helping you assure the coroner and the public that action has been taken to reduce the chances of similar problems.

- 1200+ inquests we have supported in last 10 years
- 100+ clients represented at inquests

Who we work with

- NHS providers and hospitals
- Prisons and deaths in custody
- Government bodies and regulators
- Universities and schools
- Insurers
- High secure hospitals
- Corporate organisations
- Equipment manufacturers
- Regulators
- The Fire & Rescue Service
- Charities
- Ambulance services
- Providers of residential and nursing care
- Independent sector providers
- 'Out of hours' healthcare providers

Here you can see the typical stages of an inquest. We can assist with any or all stages. You decide when and how much support you would like.



Our clients say

“Sought after for experience handling high-profile incidents and inquests.”

Band 1 - Chambers UK 2019

“I’m most grateful for your support during the Inquest. It was outstanding.”

Executive Director – Forensic Health. NHS Client

“I learned a tremendous amount through this process and valued (and enjoyed) the insight, wisdom and calibre of your interactions and advice. Thank you so much.”

Dr Nnenna Osuji, Medical Director, Croydon Health Services

“Thank you too for all your help and kindness. I am sure that your confidence helped the team, and allowed them to behave naturally and therefore convincingly. It has been a pleasure working with you too”

A University Client

“Thank you again for everything you’ve done. I hope to apply all I’ve learned in delivering safer services. You are clearly a master of your craft.”

Phil Griffiths, Head of Healthcare – HMP Notts

“Your support was invaluable and much appreciated by the witnesses ... minimising the stress for witnesses, [who] felt that you were in their corner throughout.”

Director, client



Get in touch



Jill Mason
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Going the extra mile is what Jill's team is all about. Jill heads our health and care sector and leads our healthcare and mental health law team who advise on inquests and who advise clients 24/7 on all manner of issues. They provide you and your staff with support, proactive advice, risk management lessons, advocacy, training and media input (as well as the usual legal skills).

Jill knows that in order for us to provide outstanding client service we must develop strong personal relationships with you, have a thorough understanding of your strategic aims, objectives and needs and an in depth understanding of the world you operate in.

Jill's has been advising on public and regulatory law and for the healthcare sector for over 20 years.

"The support we have received from you has been incredible. You truly are the L'Oreal of law firms (i.e. worth it)".

Executive Director



Duncan Astill
Partner
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Duncan has been at the forefront of coronial law, representing clients at Inquests since the 1990's. Since then he has dealt with inquests covering all settings, from offender health, substance misuse and detained patients to independent acute and community care. He has even represented device manufacturers whose equipment has failed, leading to the death of patients.

Complimenting that experience, Duncan is recognised as a leading Regulatory lawyer, adept at handling Police, Health and Safety and Environmental investigations and prosecutions in healthcare settings and other industries. Duncan has dealt with 100s of such investigations over the years including cases of corporate manslaughter and has an excellent record of helping clients prevent investigations becoming prosecutions.

In more recent years, Duncan has been using this contentious experience to help clients manage their risks proactively by providing advice and training to boards on governance issues.



Neil Ward
Partner
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Neil specialises in all areas of healthcare law, and acts for both public and independent sector health and care sector clients. He began his professional career acting on behalf of NHS Resolution and NHS trusts defending clinical negligence claims but now specialises in advising clients on inquests and healthcare. He advises clients on complex and challenging inquests including those engaging Article 2 and held with juries. Neil also advises on complex Court of Protection cases including serious medical treatment cases, s21A challenges to Deprivation of Liberty and the overlap between Mental Capacity Act and Mental Health Act. His experience includes a number of very complex cases where Court authority has been sought to remove a patient from the community for necessary life sustaining treatment and ethically challenging cases involving extent to which life sustaining treatment should be continued.

Neil is a well-known public speaker delivering training on the Mental Capacity Act, Mental Health Act and Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards.



Kevin Duce

Principal Associate

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Kevin is a Principal Associate Solicitor specialising in regulatory law. He has a legal career that spans 30 years in which he has dealt with all types of civil, criminal and regulatory law and practice.

A significant area of his practice covers both mental health and inquest work for both public and private sector clients. During any given year he will deal with numerous inquest instructions covering deaths in the community and in care or custody.

He regularly appears as an advocate at inquest hearings and in that regard a senior manager of one of our clients wrote:

“I just wanted to say thank you again Kevin for everything you’ve done for us/me. I’ve learnt a lot over the past 2 weeks and I hope to apply all that I’ve learned in delivering safer services. You are clearly a master of your craft and I look forward to working with you again.”



Sarah Garrood

Principal Associate

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Sarah has acted for a range of clients for over 20 years and is a very experienced inquest advocate. She has particular expertise in mental health related matters and has represented both independent sector healthcare clients and NHS Trusts at inquests following the deaths of mental health patients. This has included representing clients at complex Article 2 inquests where patients had been detained under the Mental Health Act or in prison under the care of mental health services.

In a typical case, Sarah undertakes advocacy, supports and helps witnesses to prepare, assists directors with the preparation and presentation of the management evidence, capturing and dealing with lessons from Serious Incident investigations, and persuading coroners that a prevention of future deaths report isn't needed.



Katrina McCrory

Principal Associate

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Katrina represents clients at inquests and supports them in the complex regulatory requirements around health and social care settings. She sees issues from both a provider and regulator perspective.

Katrina has assisted and advised regulators caught up in complex inquest issues and hearings.

Assured, reassuring and confident, Katrina will be your sympathetic advocate helping clients and nervous witnesses to prepare for forthcoming inquests or supporting a client by providing advocacy at the inquest itself.

Katrina expertly advised a school and its management and navigated the high profile and extremely sensitive inquest following the tragic death of a pupil.



Ruth Minnis

Principal Associate

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Ruth is a confident and keen advocate and has represented clients at many inquests. Ruth has expertly handled inquests following deaths in custody and detention.

Ruth guides our clients through the difficult processes that follow the death of somebody in care or custody. Ruth can liaise with the Coroner's Court and other interested persons on your behalf, assist with drafting witness

statements and reviewing notes, reports and records, advise you on the risks, represent you at the pre-inquest hearing, provide support to witnesses prior to the inquest and represent you at the inquest itself.

Ruth has completed three six-month secondments at a high secure psychiatric hospital.



Amanda Narkiewicz

Principal Associate

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Amanda regularly supports clients through all aspects of Coroner's inquests. Her advocacy experience includes Article 2 and jury inquests. Over the past year she has supported a client through a number of complex inquests into the deaths of individuals in the community.

Amanda seeks to make the process easier by helping witnesses to understand the process, the objectives of the coroner and anticipating the issues to address.

In addition to inquests, Amanda assists clients through investigations/ prosecutions by Police, the Health and Safety Executive and other regulators following serious incidents involving serious injuries and fatalities. She takes a proactive approach to ensure that clients get the right advice and support from the outset of what can be an extremely challenging process.



Jill Weston

Principal Associate

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Jill Weston decided to pursue a career in law following work experience with a local solicitor who was also a Coroner. She has been observing inquests for over 30 years and representing clients in them for 20. She understands the anxiety that staff can experience when asked to give a statement or appear in court and will support and assist them through the process.

Recent high-profile inquests include representing mental health trusts in relation to the death of a 7 year old who was known to their service and a 15 year old who died after living with an eating disorder for many years.



Christian Young

Principal Associate

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Christian is a Principal Associate in our Regulatory, Public & Commercial Disputes team. He joined Mills & Reeve in September 2018 from NHS England and brings over 15 years' experience of conducting inquests. Mindful of the pressures you face, Christian is happy to travel to the client and meet witnesses before hand and support staff who have become witnesses at hearings. He takes the view inquests should not be mini-trials but should be practical, sensitive and conducted on a no fault basis. He has had the benefit of being the lawyer with conduct of matters whilst in house at NHS Wales and whilst he was Deputy Head of Legal Services at NHS England. He therefore has an acute understanding of the costs incurred in these hearings and the reputational damage that can be caused.

“Our go-to person for legal...his sound understanding of the NHS environment is coupled with commercial expertise.”

Client feedback



Sarah Jacobs

Senior Associate

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Sarah is a senior associate in our Regulatory, Public & Commercial Disputes team. She is a qualified solicitor in both the UK and New Zealand, and has broad experience in advocacy, drafting, and supporting witnesses through sensitive and difficult situations. She previously worked with the New Zealand Coroner service to assist with particular inquests, so has a clear idea of what evidence a Coroner will be looking for. Sarah takes care to ensure clients and witnesses understand the process and what is expected of them.



Samuel Lindsay

Associate

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Sam is an associate in the contentious healthcare and regulatory team. He has a background in civil claims and experience working in the insurance sector. Sam's inquest practice includes representing organisations and individuals at inquest, including jury and Article 2 inquests. He has extensive experience as a solicitor advocate in Coroner's Court and has acted on a number of high profile care home and secure unit inquests with excellent results for clients. His regulatory practice includes advising on CQC and HSE regulatory compliance and assisting individuals during police investigations. He has successfully challenged regulatory decisions on behalf of clients.



Alex Pleydell

Associate

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Alex is a newly qualified solicitor. With an eye to detail and strong case management skills, Alex has 'hands-on' and significant experience of inquest work; assisting and helping witnesses before attending the inquest and managing hearings regarding deaths in the community, secure psychiatric settings and hospital settings. From his broader litigation experience, Alex is a great draftsman and can produce witness statements to make sure the Coroner gets the very best evidence.



Melissa Spurling

Associate

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Melissa has recently qualified into the firm's Regulatory, Public & Commercial Disputes Team and specialises in advising clients on all manner of regulatory issues. With that all important personal touch, Melissa's approach is to support your organisation, staff and witnesses through this difficult process. Melissa works on all types of inquests and particularly those in offender health settings. In addition to inquests, Melissa also has experience supporting clients with a wide range of other regulatory issues including health and safety investigations and enforcement actions and environmental regulations.



Kate Westley

Associate

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With almost 10 years' experience under her belt, Kate is certainly no stranger to handling inquests at all levels. An experienced advocate at hearings, including those with juries and lasting several weeks, Kate can be relied upon to guide you expertly through the process. One of Kate's key strengths is to help witnesses and your staff; to reassure and give them the confidence to do justice to themselves and all involved. Kate has worked on secondment to NHS Trusts and to NHS Resolution and knows, exactly and first-hand, the pressures and difficulties faced by health and care providers.



Lottie Hartescu

Associate

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Lottie is a newly qualified solicitor in the healthcare team who, both pre and post qualification, has gained valuable experience with inquest work in the health and social care sector. Lottie has assisted in many high-profile inquests involving deaths in hospitals (including secure psychiatric settings) and care homes and in which she has managed the inquest process, assisted with structuring evidence and supported witnesses at all steps of the Coronial process. Lottie's drafting skills and personable nature will help clients and their witnesses to feel supported and reassured throughout what can be a very stressful time in their lives. Lottie has a background in human rights law and experience with mental health law matters which give her a good understanding of the issues Article 2 Inquests involve



Dominique Wilton

Paralegal

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Dominique's main role is assisting public and private sector clients with inquest work. She liaises with both the client and the Coroner's office, assists witnesses with witness statements and supports senior colleagues with the preparation and support for the inquests. Dominique has previously spent over two and a half years on secondment at a community mental healthcare provider, supporting staff who have been required to provide the Coroner with witness statements and to attend inquests to give evidence. As well as working with the Coroner's office and the staff providing witness statements and attending inquests, this also involved working closely with those responsible at the provider for investigating incidents and providing input into prevention of future death issues.
