Coroners' Officers: FAQs

Who are coroners' officers?

Coroners' officers may be serving police officers or civilian police staff or they may be local authority employees, so the terms and conditions are not standard, nor are the job descriptions or roles and responsibilities. You will find a large variation in the role across the country.

What do coroners' officers do?

Regardless of who they are employed by, coroners' officers work on behalf of and at the direction of Her Majesty's coroner. Making inquiries into the circumstances of deaths that are: sudden and of unknown cause; are due to unnatural causes; or deaths that occur in custody.

Coroners' officers are often the main point of contact for the coroner's office and will liaise or speak to: bereaved relatives and family representatives; doctors and other health professionals; police, and other emergency services; registrars of births and deaths; funeral directors; pathologists and mortuary staff and others as relevant depending on the case.

The coroners' officer will take the report of a death, creating a record and obtaining all the relevant information so that the coroner can make a decision on how to proceed with the case, eg whether there must be an inquest or not and whether a post-mortem examination is to be held or not.

A large part of the job is discussing medical causes of death with doctors. Where necessary the coroners' officer will arrange post- mortem examinations, which are conducted by a pathologist. If an inquest is necessary the coroners' officer will be responsible for ensuring that a thorough investigation is carried out and an inquest file produced. In some areas the coroners' officer will arrange and attend the inquest hearing. Much of the work is carried out on the telephone.

What qualifications do I need?

At the moment there are no formal qualifications required for the role. The introduction of the chief coroner as part of coroner service reform should see the formal requirement for training of the staff working in the coroner's office, so it is possible that specialist training and qualifications will become mandatory.

In order to perform the job satisfactorily a person will need to be: an effective communicator with a wide spectrum of people; good at record keeping and case management with strong investigative skills. The role requires good knowledge and understanding of medical terminology, disease and treatments as well as working knowledge of coroner's law to ensure lawful working practices

Where can I find more information about the coroner's office?

The Ministry of Justice is responsible for coroners law, current coroner policy and coroner service reform. (see www.justice.gov.uk/about/moj/what-we-do/our-responsibilities)

The Office of the Chief Coroner: http://www.judiciary.gov.uk/about-the-judiciary/the-chief-coroner

the Direct Gov website:
www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/Death/WhatToDoAfterADeath/DG_066713

Many coroners' have websites with lots of general information. A useful text book is available: *Coroners Courts – A guide to law and practice* written by the Sheffield Coroner, Mr Christopher Dorries, OBE. The Coroners' Officers and Staff Association have also produced a guide specifically for coroners' officers and staff: *coroners office: a guide to practice and procedure.*

Inquests are public hearings, so you will be able to find out about coroner's investigations by sitting in the court, there will be a court listing either posted outside the court or available by enquiry to the coroner's office.

How do I get a job in the coroner's office?

If you are interested in the job, there is not a single route in, you will need to check with the local police service or local authority depending on who provides coroners' officers in your area, check the job sections in the local papers and on the relevant websites. Do as much reading about the role as possible and make sure you have the necessary skills knowledge and attributes

good luck!