

## GUIDELINES FOR THE MARRIAGE IN HOSPITAL OF A DYING PATIENT

*During normal working hours the on-call Hospital Chaplain and the Clinical Nurse Lead for the area should be contacted early on in the discussion about the marriage in Hospital of a patient who is dying. Out of hours the on-call Chaplain and the Clinical Site Nurse Practitioner (CSNP) Ext.2532, Bleep 5-001(SPH), Ext.4792, Bleep 5-530 (AH) should similarly be contacted.*

*Telephone numbers provided in this document may be given to the patient/patient's partner. If the situation requires more urgent access, the Chaplaincy holds additional confidential telephone numbers and may be able to expedite contact with the Registrar.*

1. For a marriage to take place in Hospital one of the following must be obtained:
  - a) A Registrar General's Licence *or*
  - b) A Special Licence issued by the Archbishop of Canterbury (If the marriage is to be solemnized according to the rites of the Church of England)
  
2. Either licence, as described above, will only be issued on receipt of a letter from the doctor in medical attendance on the patient (usually the Consultant) stating that:
  - *The patient who is requesting marriage is seriously ill and not expected to recover.*
  - *The patient cannot be moved to a place that is licensed for the conduct of the marriage ceremony and is unlikely to be able to be moved in the future. (N.B. The Hospital Chapels are not licenced for the conduct of the marriage ceremony.)*
  - *The patient is of sound mind and therefore capable of understanding the nature and purport of the vows and promises that will be undertaken.*The letter must be signed and dated by the Doctor appropriately qualified and registered by the General Medical Council
  
3. One of the reasons why a couple sometimes requests marriage in such circumstances is to ensure the survivor inherits the property of the person who is not expected to recover. In some cases the couple's concerns could be met by a will made on the basis of proper legal advice. Even where the marriage does take place that it is not a substitute for making a satisfactory will. Members of staff need to be sensitive to this and ensure that the couple is enabled to access appropriate advice.

## **MARRIAGE BY REGISTRAR GENERAL'S LICENCE**

***If a patient requests to be married under these circumstances speed is important. The Registrar will require certain documentation from the couple, as outlined below and the "well" partner will need time to access this paperwork. Equally, the patient needs to be as well as is possible under the circumstances in order for the marriage to be performed in a dignified and legal manner. It is therefore essential that a request of this kind is dealt with immediately.***

**The local Registrar of Births, Deaths and Ceremonies must be contacted.** It is helpful if this can be done in the first instance by the ward staff as the Registrar will need a point of contact. After that contact numbers should be given to the future Spouse who will usually be required to visit the Registrar in the local office at **81 Outlands Drive, Weybridge KT13 9LN**, Tel: **0300 200 1002**. Opening Hours are 9.00am – 4.30pm, Monday – Friday. (Wednesday 9.30am – 4.30pm) **In an emergency out-of-hours** the Registrar on Call can be contacted on **0300 200 1002**. A message left on voice mail would normally be picked up by the Registrar on Call. In the unlikely event that the On call Registrar has not returned the call within one hour, the General Register Office (Security) should be contacted on **0151 471 4237** or if that is unavailable **0151 461 4223**. The custodian will arrange for the relevant registrar to be contacted directly by a member of the General Register Office staff.

The couple will need:

- A letter from the consultant, as detailed above, **see Appendix A** (to be faxed to the Register Office on **01932 794711**)
- A current Passport for both parties or copy birth certificates, if possible.
- Where either of the parties have been married before and widowed, death certificate(s) of their former spouse(s) will need to be produced and in some cases their previous marriage certificates, .
- Where either party has been married before, and divorced, the original decree(s) absolute are required, and, in some cases, their respective marriage certificates., .
- If one or other of the applicants is under the age of 18 years written parental consent will be required for the marriage to proceed.

*If any of the documents are not readily available the registrar should be contacted without delay. It is sometimes possible to proceed without them, prior to verification.*

Once the Doctor's letter has been received, documents produced and notice taken, the process can be completed very quickly. In some circumstances the Registrar may be able to take the notice at the Hospital immediately prior to the Ceremony taking place once the licence has been issued. (Please note that there will be a charge to the couple for the licence and any copy certificates).

The marriage must take place at the patient's bedside. The patient and his/her partner, the witnesses and other guests must be afforded as much quiet and privacy for the ceremony as possible. Space is needed to enable the Registrar to conduct a dignified ceremony. The newly married couple will need space for signing the marriage register.

The Registrar is able to conduct a civil ceremony (a ceremony with no religious content) which can be followed by a religious blessing once the Registrar has left. The Hospital Chaplain will be happy to arrange this, either personally or through the appropriate religious leader. Again, privacy and space will be essential as far as possible.

Alternatively a religious marriage may be conducted by a suitably recognized religious representative in the presence of the Registrar.

### **ACCORDING TO THE RITES OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND**

**(NB: Chaplains can access emergency contact numbers where necessary)**

In speaking of emergency marriages in hospital, a distinction is drawn between:

**Category i. – where a patient is not expected to recover or to be able to leave hospital but is not in immediate danger of dying**

It is possible for an Anglican Hospital Chaplain to solemnize a marriage in the hospital according to the rites of the Church of England on the authority of a **Superintendent Registrar's Certificate** (Marriage Act 1983). However, the statutory requirements for the marriage of a "house-bound" person will need to be complied with, including the normal requirement that the certificate cannot be issued until 7 days after notice has been given to the Superintendent Registrar. If it is possible to obtain an SRC this should be done in preference to an Archbishop's Special Licence, on the basis that the SRC is the more statutorily normal preliminary intended for this circumstance.

**Category ii – where there is an expectation of risk of death within a short time**

The only way in which a marriage according to the rites of the Church of England can be arranged at short notice is by applying for an **Archbishop's Special Marriage Licence**.

Archbishop's Special Licences are issued from the Faculty Office at 1 The Sanctuary, London SW1P 3JT. The On Call Chaplain will need to contact the Office on **020 7222 5381**. (Fax **020 7222 7502**, email: [faculty.office@1TheSanctuary.com](mailto:faculty.office@1TheSanctuary.com)). The Office is open Monday to Friday during normal office hours. There is an emergency service out of office hours and telephone numbers are held in the Chaplain's Office. They should not be used for routine enquiries or released to members of the public.

An Archbishop's Special Licence is a privilege to which certain conditions are attached:

- i. The couple should genuinely desire a wedding according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England
- ii. There must be a need for the wedding to take place in hospital;
- iii. The families of the couple should support the intended marriage and the marriage should not be the cause of scandal;
- iv. Both parties to the marriage must be of sound mind, and not mentally incapacitated because of his/her/their illness
- v. N.B. It will not be possible for the application to proceed if one or other of the parties has been previously married and divorced.

Applications should be submitted on the prescribed application form, copies of which are available from the Faculty Office. In connection with applications for Special Marriage Licences certain documentation is required:

- i. A letter from the doctor in attendance. The exact wording is important. You may use the enclosed example as a model (Appendix B),
- ii. A note of authorization from the hospital management (Appendix C)
- iii. A letter from the member of the clergy detailing the circumstances of the application.

The Special Licence application has two stages. The first is the completion of the application form with the couple and the sending of this and the supporting documents to the Registrar. If the application is approved, the second stage is for an affidavit and commission to be sent out and sworn by the bride or groom. The Licence can then be

granted. If the patient is in an unstable condition the Licence can provide for marriage to take place 'AT ANY TIME' including outside the canonical hours of 8.00am to 6.00 pm.

**Appendix A**

Ashford and St. Peter's Hospitals   
NHS Foundation Trust

Guildford Road  
Chertsey, KT16 0PZ

For the Attention of:  
The Superintendent Registrar  
Weybridge Register Office  
81 Oatlands Drive,  
Weybridge, KT13 9LN

DATE:

**EMERGENCY MARRIAGE IN HOSPITAL**  
**LETTER OF REQUEST FOR AUTHORISATION FROM DOCTOR ATTENDING THE PATIENT**

HOSPITAL : :

WARD/UNIT:

CONTACT DETAILS: Telephone/Bleep

PATIENT'S FULL NAME:

HOME ADDRESS:

The patient, whose details are given above, has indicated that they wish to be married in the above named Hospital as soon as possible. In respect of this request I certify that:

- I am in the doctor in medical attendance on the above named patient
- The patient is seriously ill and is not expected to recover
- The patient cannot be moved from the hospital to a place registered for marriages
- The patient understands the nature and purport of marriage ceremony.

SIGNATURE OF DOCTOR:

NAME OF DOCTOR:

GMC REGISTRATION NUMBER:

\*\*INITIALS (See below):

***\*\*Please note that, if at all possible, this documentation should be completed by the Medical Consultant or Registrar in attendance on the patient. If this is not possible, then the Doctor completing it must initial this document as above to say that his/her decision has been discussed with a senior member of the Medical Team.***

***This form will need to be faxed as a matter of urgency to the Weybridge Register Office on 01932 794711. Arrangements for the marriage cannot be put in place until the Office has***

**received it. IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THE ORIGINAL OF THIS LETTER IS HANDED TO THE REGISTRARS WHEN THEY ATTEND THE HOSPITAL FOR THE CEREMONY**

**Appendix B**

Ashford and St. Peter's Hospitals   
NHS Foundation Trust

Guildford Road  
Chertsey,  
KT16 0PZ

The Faculty Office  
1 The Sanctuary,  
London  
SW1P 3JT.

**DATE:**

**EMERGENCY MARRIAGE IN HOSPITAL**  
**ACCORDING TO THE RITES OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND**  
**LETTER OF REQUEST FOR AUTHORISATION FROM DOCTOR ATTENDING THE PATIENT**

**HOSPITAL IN WHICH MARRIAGE IS REQUESTED TO TAKE PLACE:**

**WARD/UNIT:**

**CONTACT DETAILS:**

**PATIENT'S FULL NAME:**

**ADDRESS:**

The patient, whose details are given above, has indicated that they wish to be married in the above named Hospital as soon as possible. In respect of this request I certify that:

- I am in the doctor in medical attendance on the above named patient
- The patient is seriously ill and is not expected to recover
- The patient cannot be moved from the hospital to a place registered for marriages
- The patient understands the nature and purport of marriage ceremony.

**SIGNATURE OF DOCTOR:**

**NAME OF DOCTOR:**

**GMC REGISTRATION NUMBER:**

**\*\*INITIALS (See below):**

***\*\*Please note that, if at all possible, this documentation should be completed by the Medical Consultant or Registrar in attendance on the patient. If this is not possible, then the Doctor***

*completing it must initial this document as above to say that his/her decision has been discussed with a senior member of the Medical Team.*

*Appendix C*



Guildford Road  
Chertsey,  
KT16 0PZ

The Faculty Office  
1 The Sanctuary,  
London  
SW1P 3JT.

**DATE:**

**EMERGENCY MARRIAGES IN HOSPITAL  
ACCORDING TO THE RITES OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
PERMISSION FROM CHIEF EXECUTIVE OR APPROPRIATE REPRESENTATIVE  
FOR MARRIAGE TO TAKE PLACE IN HOSPITAL**

**HOSPITAL IN WHICH MARRIAGE IS REQUESTED TO TAKE PLACE:**

**WARD/UNIT:**

**CONTACT DETAILS:**

**PATIENT'S FULL NAME:**

**ADDRESS:**

I confirm that permission is given for the above named patient to be married in hospital.

**SIGNATURE OF AUTHORISING OFFICER:**

**POSITION HELD:**

**FULL NAME:**