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HER MAJESTY'S SENIOR CORONER
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Dear All,

IMPORTANT UPDATE FROM NORTH MANCHESTER CORONER SERVICE – COVID 19

This letter is being sent to all our stakeholders to inform you of the decision taken today by myself, Senior Coroner of North Manchester.

As you will be aware, the situation regarding COVID 19 is changing rapidly. On Friday of last week Italy was in lockdown and by today Spain, France, Australia, New Zealand and others have either also gone into lockdown or have closed their borders, the Prime Minister has restricted social interactions in gatherings as small as pubs and warned everyone that we will lose a number of people before their time. Currently, there are only a small number of COVID 19 cases in the Greater Manchester Area. However, this situation will change quickly over the next 2-3 weeks and we are advised the infection will become far more prevalent.

Therefore after much deliberation I have made the difficult decision to adjourn all Inquest hearings as from 4pm on Monday 23rd March 2020 until the 1st September 2020. All cases listed between this period of time will now be removed from our list. All witnesses and families will be contacted. Of course should the situation change dramatically then I will reassess matters, however this seems unlikely at this point in time.

In view of the competing demands on medical staff, it would be unconscionable to require them to attend inquests when the needs of the living are likely to be so great. Some Trusts have already requested adjournments of cases due to clinical pressures. Having considered the use of videoconferencing, the technical difficulties are significant and problematic in our current location. Likewise many Inquests involve staff from Care Homes who are unable to attend.

This date was chosen taking into consideration the recommended 3 months isolation for the elderly, who regularly attend our inquests. In addition the difficulty of listing Inquests in August.

For everyone it is acknowledged that lack of certainty and clarity is difficult and at this time it was felt a clear decision, however difficult is the right way to proceed.

Coroners will continue to review files and once complete, if a documentary (paper) inquest can be offered it will be. The system of FastTrack Inquests for known diagnoses such as mesothelioma or where a GP is unavailable will operate as normal.

The adjournment of Inquests will also allow us to concentrate on dealing with deaths resulting from normal mortality and the pandemic and any problems that occur due to illness amongst the staff.

I would like to thank you all for the contributions you make to ensure our service can offer the best service it can to the bereaved. For the moment we will maintain core service of dealing with bereaved families and investigating deaths but without placing undue strain on clinical staff. We will still be requesting information in order to progress investigations but we will of course take any requests for extensions of time into consideration. We will review the time we allow for production of evidence.

Please look after your own health and that of your teams.

Yours Faithfully

Joanne Kearsley
Senior Coroner
Manchester North