

M E M O R A N D U M

FROM:

County Medical Officer of Health,
Guildhall Road,
Northampton.

TO:

Midwives.

50/63

23rd July, 1963.

Midwives' Code of Practice

In my memorandum of 15th June, 1961, I gave details of the revised paragraph 4 of Notice 10(4) of the Midwives' Code of Practice, which concerned the issuing of certificates of stillbirth. It was pointed out that the legal duty of giving such a certificate rested in the first instance on any medical practitioner who was present at the birth or who examined the body and on the midwife only if there was no such attendance or examination.

A further communication has now been received from the Central Midwives Board in which it is stated that about 85% of stillbirths are now registered by medical practitioners. Although a proportion of the remaining 15% are quite rightly issued by midwives, it is believed that in a small number of cases, they are still completing certificates when a medical practitioner is in fact present.

Whilst not wishing in any way to infringe the statutory responsibility of the midwife to complete the certificate in the absence of a registered medical practitioner, the Board consider that it would be in the interests of the mother and of accurate certification if, where arrangements had been made with a practitioner to undertake maternity care, he should be called in to examine the body even where he had not been in attendance earlier. The Board would be glad, therefore, if midwives would ask the medical practitioner in attendance, or called in, to complete the requisite certificate.

To clarify the position, the following paragraphs have been substituted for the fourth sub-paragraph of paragraph 4 of Notice No. 10 of the Notices concerning a midwife's Code of Practice.

"When a registered medical practitioner is present at a stillbirth or examines the body, it is his statutory duty to give the qualified informant (usually the father or mother) a certificate of stillbirth. If a registered medical practitioner is not present at a stillbirth, but arrangements for maternity care have been made with one, the midwife should inform him and ask him to examine the body and complete the certificate of stillbirth.

Otherwise the midwife should give the certificate if she was present at the stillbirth or examined the body. Whenever possible, the midwife should state on this certificate the cause of death and the estimated duration of the pregnancy to the best of her knowledge and belief."

J. J. A. R.