

# Guidelines for the Marriage in Hospital of a Dying Patient



It is important that the on-call Hospital Chaplain, and the on-call Trust Manager, should be contacted early on in the discussion about the marriage in Hospital of a patient who is dying.

1.

For a marriage to take place in Hospital one of the following must be obtained:

- a. A Special Licence issued by the Archbishop of Canterbury (If the marriage is to be solemnised according to the rites of the Church of England)
- b. A Registrar General's Licence (For all other circumstances).

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 licensed for the conduct of the marriage ceremony.)
- The patient is 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 who must be appropriately qualified and registered by the General Medical Council

3.

If the patient wished to be married according to the rites of the Church of England, application must be made to:

The Registrar of the Court of Faculties  
1 The Sanctuary  
London SW1  
Tel: 020 7222 5381

This procedure will involve the patient's future spouse visiting the Registrar at the Sanctuary and swearing an affidavit in his presence. The Registrar will require:

- A letter from the patient's Consultant, as outlined above.
- A letter from the Chief Executive, giving permission for the marriage to take place in the hospital.
- A letter from an ordained minister of the Church of England (usually, but not always, the Hospital Chaplain) stating his/her willingness to conduct the ceremony.
- The birth certificates of both partners, if possible.
- Where one or both partners have been previously married and widowed, their respective marriage certificates, and the death certificate(s) of their former spouse(s).
- 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.

This process should normally take about two days, and the Archbishop's Licence (circa £100) will be issued into the hand of the applicant.

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.

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| 4. | <p>In all other circumstances the local Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths must be contacted on 01932-794712.</p> <p>This procedure will involve the future spouse visiting the Registrar in the local Weybridge office. The Registrar will require from the applicant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A letter from the consultant, as detailed above.</li> <li>• The birth certificates of both parties, if possible.</li> <li>• Where one or both partners have been previously married and widowed, their respective marriage certificates, and death certificate(s) of their former spouse(s).</li> <li>• Where one or both partners have been previously married and divorced, their respective marriage certificates, and the decree(s) absolute.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul> <p>This process can be completed very quickly. A Licence will be issued (circa £15) and the Registrar will attend the Hospital to conduct the Ceremony.</p> <p>Please note that, according to the law of the land, in order for marriage to be recognised in this country it must, when taking place in Hospital, always be conducted by the Registrar, or, in certain circumstances which the Registrar must explain and approve, must be conducted in the presence of the Registrar by a suitably recognised religious representative. The ONLY exception to this is when the marriage is conducted by an ordained minister of the Church of England following the issue of the Archbishop's Special Licence. The Registrar is always available to offer clarification of these points, and any further advice that is needed. If there is ANY doubt about how to proceed it is essential that advice be sought.</p> |
| 5. | <p>When the marriage is arranged it is essential that the patient and his/her partner and the witnesses and any others attending are afforded as much quiet and privacy for the ceremony as possible. Space will be needed to enable the Registrar of the Church of England Priest to conduct the ceremony in a dignified way. The newly married couple will need appropriate space for the signing of the marriage certificate. The Civil ceremony is relatively brief, but if the ceremony is conducted according to the rites of the Church of England, it may take a slightly longer time.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 6. | <p>Some patients may have elected to have a civil wedding under the licence of the Registrar, but they may wish to have a religious blessing to follow the ceremony. 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.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 7. | <p>In some circumstances it may be possible for the ceremony to take place in one of the Hospital Chapels. However this will depend both on the condition of the patient and the advice of the Registrar and the Hospital Chaplain.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 8. | <p>Time permitting; it would be very appropriate if the ceremony could be acknowledged on the Ward by the gift of e.g. flowers /cards/a cake etc. as is both possible and appropriate.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |