

## Further Information



**Dr Mary Sheppard** MBBCh FRCPath

A fellow of the Royal College of Pathologists, Consultant Histopathologist at the Royal Brompton Hospital and Reader in Cardiovascular Pathology at Imperial College London. Dr Sheppard is an expert cardiac pathologist and has established an international cardiac referral centre at the CRY Centre for Cardiac Pathology, Royal Brompton Hospital with funding from the charity CRY (Cardiac Risk in the Young) to investigate young sudden cardiac deaths. Dr Sheppard undertakes extensive research and is widely published. Her textbook on cardiovascular pathology is now in its 2nd edition. As Reader in Cardiovascular Pathology for Imperial College London, she also lectures regularly to undergraduate and postgraduate students and is an invited speaker at both national and international meetings. Dr Sheppard is the Cardiovascular Pathology representative on the specialist advisory committee of Royal College of Pathologists. In addition, she is a member of the editorial board and subeditor (cardiac pathology) for the Journal Histopathology and editorial board member of Cardiovascular Pathology. Dr Sheppard is also an advisor to governmental bodies in relation to cardiovascular pathology and on the UK steering group developing a national database on sudden cardiac death. She is pathology representative in the UK Association of Inherited Cardiac Diseases.

### Further support

Following a young sudden cardiac death (YSCD) families often seek emotional support and further information. CRY's Bereavement Support Network (CRY BSN) is made up of volunteers with experience of a similar tragedy who have undertaken CRY's accredited counselling training to help others cope with this experience. We also provide opportunities for bereaved families to come together at our annual CRY Family Medical Conference in London and CRY Regional Bereavement Support Days around the UK. Families affected by YSCD need to understand the potential genetic risks, and to help them, CRY provides specialist cardiac information suitable for people from non-medical backgrounds. Visit [www.c-r-y.org.uk/living\\_with\\_loss.htm](http://www.c-r-y.org.uk/living_with_loss.htm)



## CRY Centre for Cardiac Pathology (CRY CCP)



Unexplained sudden death is often recorded by the coroner as due to 'natural causes.' Experts believe that most of these tragedies are due to sudden cardiac death. In 2008 CRY's fundraisers facilitated the establishment of the CRY Centre for Cardiac Pathology (CRY CCP), centre of excellence for fast-track expert cardiac pathology service for bereaved families based at the Royal Brompton Hospital in London. CRY provides this service funding the cost of coroners' referrals so that families no longer have the ordeal of a protracted wait for the cause of death of their child or partner.

**This leaflet has been devised to help with some of the practical aspects following a young sudden death.**

## Cardiac Risk in the Young

A charity offering help, support and counselling to affected families

The CRY Centre for Cardiac Pathology was established with a donation from the Howard and Sebastian English Memorial Fund.

Head office: Unit 7, Epsom Downs Metro Centre, Waterfield, Tadworth, Surrey KT20 5LR  
Tel: (01737) 363222 Fax: (01737) 363444 E-mail: [cry@c-r-y.org.uk](mailto:cry@c-r-y.org.uk) Web: [www.c-r-y.org.uk](http://www.c-r-y.org.uk)

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## After a Young Sudden Death: Information for Coroners and GPs

CRY CCP, Department of Histopathology, Royal Brompton Hospital,  
Sydney Street, London SW3 6NP  
Tel: (0207) 3518267 Fax: (0207) 3518293 Web: [www.cry-ccp.org.uk](http://www.cry-ccp.org.uk)

# Information for Coroners

## Specialist cardiac pathology at the CRY Centre for Cardiac Pathology is:

**Free of charge** when

- the cause of death is unascertained, and
- the person is aged 35 years or under

**Examination / report**

- we aim to issue this to the coroner within 2 weeks of receiving the specimen.

The coroner should then pass this information onto the family and GP without delay.

### To make a referral:

#### Unascertained cause of death - deceased aged 35 years and under:

Contact Jemma Wells  
(Medical Secretary to Dr Sheppard)

tel (0207) 3518267  
fax (0207) 3518293  
e-mail [j.wells@rbht.nhs.uk](mailto:j.wells@rbht.nhs.uk)

#### Deceased aged 36 years and over:

Deaths over the age of 36 years can be referred but normal charges will apply.

Contact Histopathology Department tel (0207) 3518425

**Full postal address:** Dr Mary Sheppard,  
CRY Centre for Cardiac Pathology,  
Department of Histopathology,  
Royal Brompton Hospital,  
Sydney Street,  
London SW3 6NP

### With permission:

Families are increasingly prepared to give permission for this fast-track service which aims to return the heart in 2 weeks in time for burial. It is extremely helpful if the coroner requests permission for the whole heart to be sent as this greatly facilitates the accuracy of the diagnosis.

However, if the family only give permission for tissue to be taken from the heart at autopsy it will be stored at the CRY CCP at the Royal Brompton hospital.



# Information for GPs

*"I think it is very important that general practitioners become aware of conditions causing sudden cardiac death in young people. Before my own daughter Laura collapsed and died in front of me in 2003, whilst working in my surgery, I knew little about the subject. She had undiagnosed ARVC.*

*It is through my subsequent contact with Cardiac Risk in the Young that my own awareness and knowledge has increased. Although these conditions are uncommon for individual GPs there are many of them and in practice, rare things occur commonly. They could affect any one of the families in a GP's care at any time, and in my opinion, knowing where to obtain good support, information, and advice is crucial to effective general practice care. CRY is this source." Dr Tony Hillier, GP.*



It is important to refer family members to a specialist cardiologist after a diagnosis is made because many of the cardiac diseases causing sudden cardiac death are inherited.

Dr Mary Sheppard works closely with the fast-track screening service at the CRY Centre for Inherited Cardiac Conditions and Sports Cardiology at St. George's Hospital, Tooting, a vital link offering screening to all first degree relatives together after a sudden death.

CRY can provide advice regarding referrals for expert screening for family members which aims to be within 4 weeks of receiving the referral.

On completion of the examination Dr Sheppard recommends that the family should be screened by a cardiologist with expertise in inherited cardiovascular conditions.

Dr Sheppard's diagnosis provides vital information for the cardiologist which will direct the investigations of those individuals at risk.

The cardiologist will be provided with a copy of the pathology report, on request, from Dr Sheppard.

### The process:

- When Dr Sheppard examines the heart a small amount of tissue is taken from the heart which is embedded in wax to be preserved indefinitely. From these wax blocks thin sections are cut to look at under a microscope to look for hidden disease that cannot be seen by the naked eye.
- These blocks and slides are, with family consent obtained by the coroner, preserved indefinitely. They are a valuable source for teaching and research.
- If permission has been obtained by the coroner for the heart to be sent to Dr Sheppard it will be returned within 2 weeks in time for burial.
- Taking of spleen may be required for genetic testing at the time of autopsy. This is only done if specific consent for research, teaching and genetics has been obtained.
- If specific consent to retain tissue is not received for the purposes of research and teaching then the heart tissue blocks and slides will be returned to the referring hospital.