

29 April 2020

Rachel Nicol
Coroner's Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street
Southbank VIC 3006

Dear Ms Nicol,

Re: Court ref: COR 2018 003515 – Francis J Stewart

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) acknowledges receipt of your letter dated 4 February 2020 regarding the death of Francis J Stewart (Court ref: COR 2018 003515).

Pursuant to Section 72(2) of the Coroners Act 2008, the RACGP responds to the recommendation as follows:

Recommendation

That the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners develop and distribute a guidance sheet to their practitioners that:

- i. reminds practitioners about the risk of adrenal crisis, the nonspecific nature of symptoms and presentations preceding a crisis, the importance of prompt recognition and treatment to reduce its associated morbidity and mortality and the need to adjust medication during periods of stress and illness;**
- ii. promotes the implementation and use of medical record software that prominently highlights medical alerts for conditions such as adrenal insufficiency when the file is opened to make the information clear to any doctor or nurse at the practice;**
- iii. highlights the need for general practitioners to ensure that patient's relatives, friends and/or carers are educated about adrenal insufficiency, the signs and symptoms of adrenal insufficiency, and preventative measures that should be undertaken to mitigate against the risk of an adrenal crisis, particularly during periods of stress and illness;**
- iv. promotes the benefits of seeking specialist input regarding the management of adrenal insufficiency during periods of illness or stress.**

There is acknowledgement that adrenal insufficiency is rare. It would be very difficult for GPs to 'ensure' that relatives, friends and carers are educated given privacy concerns and lack of access to those individuals. It would instead be more reasonable for GPs to encourage their patients to discuss their condition with their important others and to read an explanation sheet – such as provided by the endocrinologist.

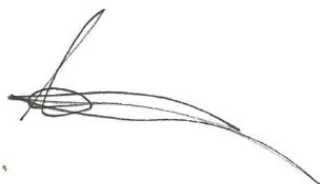
The vast majority of GP practices utilise modern medical software and it is reasonable to expect GPs to maintain records so that the 'current medical conditions' contains an important list of relevant ongoing conditions. Similarly,

medications taken by the patient should be updated at every opportunity. There are principles espoused in the RACGP's Standards for general practice.

The RACGP provided the recommended guidance to all RACGP members on 28 February 2020, reproduced in Attachment 1.

Should you or the Coroner wish to discuss this further, please contact RACGP Victoria on (03) 8699 0979.

Yours sincerely



Dr Cameron Loy
Chair, RACGP Victoria

Attachment 1 – RACGP *InPractice* item

Attachment 1 – RACGP *InPractice* newsletter article

Coroners Court of Victoria recommendations

The Coroners Court of Victoria recently made recommendations to the RACGP following the death of a patient from sepsis complicating bronchopneumonia and a chest wall abscess in the setting of adrenal crisis.

The Coroner asked the RACGP to advise their members to:

- be mindful of the risk of adrenal crisis, with particular consideration to
 - the non-specific nature of symptoms preceding a crisis
 - the importance of quick recognition and treatment of crisis
 - adjusting medication during periods of stress and illness
- ensure that your medical software alerts for conditions such as adrenal insufficiency when the file is opened
- ensure the patient's relatives, friends and/or carers are educated about adrenal insufficiency. This includes the signs and symptoms of a crisis, and the preventive measures to reduce the risk of crisis
- liaise with specialists regarding the management of adrenal insufficiency during times of illness or stress for the patient.

Published in the RACGP's national newsletter, *InPractice*, on 28 February 2020