



## Predicting Death

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### 1. Background

A key workstream within the National End of Life Care Strategy<sup>1</sup> is the identification by health professionals of individuals who are in the last year of life so that they can be offered Advanced Care Planning. End of Life Care Registers are being developed to support this by holding information on these patients. This information will be readily available to health and social care professionals who may be involved in planned or emergency care. There is conflicting information on the proportion of the population for whom this may be possible. There is also a desire to understand the extent to which death is predictable in order to plan care and to estimate costs specifically of end of life care.

### 2. Aims

The aims of the research were to review data from a number of sources in order to estimate the proportion of registered deaths which may be unexpected and therefore unlikely to be included on an End of Life Care Register. An unexpected death has been defined as “any death not due to terminal illness; or a death the family was not expecting”<sup>2</sup>. However, patients with chronic or terminal diseases also die unexpectedly; therefore the above definition could be viewed as too stringent,

### 3. Methodology

We examined the following data sources in order to estimate the proportion of deaths in England and Wales which may be unexpected: Ministry of Justice Coronial Service statistics<sup>3</sup>; Office for National Statistics (ONS) mortality data; National Audit Office<sup>4</sup>, Omega report<sup>5</sup>. See Figure 1 for an example of data sourced.

### 4. Results

- 22% of all registered deaths in 2009 could be classified as unexpected based on Ministry of Justice data.
- Assuming certain underlying causes of death on death certificate cause an unexpected death e.g. acute MI, 25% of deaths could be classified as unexpected using ONS mortality data.
- The Omega report identifies 42% of deaths as being ‘sudden’ or ‘unpredictable’.
- The National Audit Office report states that 8% of the deaths surveyed were unexpected yet 32% of deaths were ‘not expected’. We therefore assume that the conclusion of 8% is an under-estimate of the proportion of registered deaths in England and Wales that could be defined as unexpected.

### 5. Conclusions

At least 25% of all deaths in England and Wales are unexpected from sudden causes. Of course, many patients with chronic disease may also die unexpectedly. This would increase the proportion of ‘unexpected’ deaths and would account for some to the discrepancy in the Omega report which describes 42% of deaths as ‘sudden’ or ‘unpredictable’. This finding will assist in service planning when considering the development and implementation of End of Life Care registers and associated service provision.

### 6. References

- <sup>1</sup>Department of Health (2008) *End of Life Care Strategy: Promoting high quality care for all adults at the end of life*,
- <sup>2</sup> Dosani, S (2002) ‘Dead Cert: a guide to death certificates’ student BMJ 10:45-88,
- <sup>3</sup> Ministry of Justice (2010) *Statistics Bulletin: Statistics on deaths reported to coroners England and Wales, 2009*,
- <sup>4</sup> Sheffield Primary Care Trust and the National Audit Office (2008) *Identifying alternatives to hospital for people at the end of life: report of findings*,
- <sup>5</sup> Omega (2009) *End of life care in primary care 2009 national snapshot*.

