

## **MRSA Deaths - Background**

### **Why these figures must be used with caution**

Recording of MRSA infection on death certificates is based on the clinical judgement of the doctor certifying the death. Changes in the number of cases year on year may be influenced by increased professional awareness of MRSA, and may not be a reliable indicator of real trends. In addition, when the National Records of Scotland (NRS) uses information from death certificates to identify deaths from MRSA, an element of interpretation is required in some cases. This can be due to, for example, insufficient detail being provided, non-standard abbreviations being used, etc.

### **Why there are differences between some of the figures which are published**

There are a number of reasons why there may be differences between the figures which are produced by different bodies, or are published at different times.

First, because a range of information is available from the death certificate as described on the ['Death Certificates and Coding the Causes of Death'](#) page, figures for MRSA can be produced on the following bases:

- 'underlying cause' - cases where MRSA was the cause which initiated the chain of events leading directly to death;
- 'contributory factor' - cases where MRSA was not the underlying cause of death, but contributed to or hastened the occurrence of the death.
- 'any mention' - i.e. MRSA was either the underlying cause of the death or a factor that contributed to, or hastened, the death.

Second, NRS's normal practice is to count deaths on the basis of the area of usual residence of the deceased rather than of the place of occurrence of death. When the person's usual residence is outwith Scotland the place of occurrence is used. Therefore, the number of deaths for example in a health board area is normally the number of deaths of residents of that area (plus the small number of deaths of people from outwith Scotland which occurred in that area). However, figures for MRSA deaths can also be produced on the basis of the health board which contains the hospital in which the death occurred (with people who died at home being counted as "non-hospital" deaths). For some health boards, the two sets of figures will differ, due to residents of one area having died in hospitals in another area.