

**- APPENDIX C -****- Description of the Conclusion "Natural Causes" -**

**A death is considered to have arisen from Natural Causes if the evidence shows that it is probable (that is, more likely than not) that the cause of death was the result of a naturally occurring disease process running its [full] course.**

The word "natural" should be given its "usual meaning". It will be necessary to consider carefully all the evidence from medically qualified witnesses and, in particular, whether the cause of death is one which, in the particular circumstances, can properly be described as "natural".

The correct wording for the conclusion is - *CD died from natural causes.*

In S.8(1) Coroners Act 1988 (which sets out those deaths which should be referred to the coroner) the reference remains for the coroner to hold an inquest into those deaths which are "violent and unnatural" rather being relieved of inquests into those deaths which are found to be "natural." Thus, there is an inference that deaths which are not "violent or unnatural" must be "natural."

The question of what is, or is not, "natural" may well vary from time to time as understanding and knowledge evolves. Consider the question of AIDS (already debated at length in various medico legal forums), or deaths related to smoking or from drink related alcoholic cirrhosis. The term "unnatural" which is one of the "triggers" empowering a coroner to hold an inquest must be considered in its normal meaning - or rather the antithesis "natural" must be so considered. However, between "natural" and "unnatural" there may well be a grey area. Each case has to be decided solely on the evidence in that case.

"It is the underlying cause of death rather than the terminal event which is the test as to whether the death is from unnatural causes and therefore properly referable to the coroner. The terminal event may be relatively innocuous and this, in itself, underlines the importance of close scrutiny of the causal chain". [per Leckey & Greer, Coroners' Law and Practice in Northern Ireland]

"It may be suggested that this is the normal progression of a natural illness, without any significant element of human intervention." [per Dorries, Coroners' Courts]

It is a practical question of fact to be decided upon on the basis of ordinary common sense.

In *R.v Birmingham Coroner, ex parte Benton* [1997], guidance was given as to the interaction between "Natural" and "Unnatural" deaths -

- a) Where the deceased was suffering from a potentially fatal condition, and the medical intervention failed to prevent the death, the proper conclusion was "Natural Causes"