

The sad costs of death – Improving Tell Us Once.

Tell Us Once is a great idea. It looks as if the government wants to help the relatives of those who have just died, and to be efficient at the same time. I recently suggested it does not work out like that. Today I wish to explain a bit more of the details.

The first odd thing about Tell Us Once is someone registering a death with a Registrar is told about it at the end of the interview. Much of the data needed for Tell Us Once has been collected and accepted by the Registrar, but he or she does not then press a button to save all that in Tell Us Once format, nor help the relative with the Tell Us Once declaration. Instead the person is issued with a website address and a unique access code and told to go home and go through the whole registration process again on their own, telling the computer what they have just told the Registrar and answering some extra questions about whether the person who has died was receiving benefits and a pension. This makes it Tell Us Twice. It can also be difficult for the relative to do, as they may not know the financial details of the deceased. Surely the state, primed with the dead person's National Insurance number, name, address and tax identifier knows what money it is sending the person?

The second odd thing is that not all parts of the government sign up to Tell Us Once. So if, for example, the deceased had a few premium bonds Tell Us Once would not help the relatives as National Savings are not in the system. Why can't all parts of national and local government be in it?

The third odd thing is it may not work. The relative of the deceased may still get separate communications asking for information already supplied from the Tax authorities. Payments may still be made of pensions and benefits after the state knows the details of the death. Dead patients may stay on GP lists.

I have asked Ministers to look into this. I do so because I think grieving relatives deserve better. I have also done so because the current system is a waste of taxpayers money, sending money to the deceased and then going through a complex process to get it back.