Being called to give evidence at an inquest is a stressful experience for any doctor. There are a number of reasons for this:

* A lack of familiarity about the process, and legal proceedings in general.
* Fears that our performance will be judged or found wanting.
* Often inquests occur years after what are likely to have been highly stressful events.
* Notes may have been written with limited time available, or by some one else.

Additionally for trainees, you may no longer be an employee of the Trust involved. You may even be working in a different speciality or part of the country. This can make communication with the Trust’s legal department difficult (as their role is to represent the interests of the Trust). Supervising consultants may have retired, or no longer work in the Trust either.

There are national and regional guidelines available to help support trainees through the process. Here is the HEE TV guidance, and also advice on the support processes:

<http://www.oxforddeanery.nhs.uk/pdf/Coroners%20Inquests%20-%20A%20Guide%20for%20Learners_FINAL.PDF>

<http://www.oxforddeanery.nhs.uk/pdf/Supporting_Trainees_attending_Coroner_Court.pdf>

The HEE TV advice states:

*“Support for a doctor in training attending an inquest will come, in the first instance, from the doctor’s employer, whether the trainee is in primary or secondary care.*

*For trainees in secondary care the Trust’s Risk Management team (or equivalent) will usually co- ordinate the practical support for all Trust employees involved in an inquest. . . .”*

However, very often the Trust dealing with the inquest is no longer the trainee’s employer. Furthermore, the Trust’s Risk Management Team may not always be aware of this advice.

We have raised this issue with the all the Post Graduate Training Schools and Directors of Medical Education in the Deanery. There is agreement that the best person for trainees to contact within the Trust, that is actually dealing with the Inquest, is the Director of Medical Education.

We will also support you within the School of Anaesthesia and Intensive Care. Please talk with your current Educational Supervisor. As these are relatively uncommon events, however, your ES may not feel they have the appropriate experience or knowledge to help you. In which case, do please continue to ask for support via your College Tutor, Training Programme Director, or Head of School. (This advice also applies if you have transferred from another region and are due to give evidence at an Inquest in another Deanery). We will always aim to offer support. This may be by liaising with the Trust in question. There are also courses available that help to “demystify” the Inquest process and prepare doctors who are called to attend. We can signpost and where possible (within HEE budgetary constraints) support attendance at such courses for trainees involved in an Inquest.

We recognize that from the moment a significant event occurs, there may be considerable stress for those involved. This is likely to be long before any decision to proceed to an inquest. The Trust may involve you early in formal processes such as report writing for event investigations. Again, your Educational Supervisor and the rest of the School team, along with the DME and Trust’s educational team are able to support you. They need to be involved.

They key message is that you do not need to feel alone with this. Please do ask for help.