UNIVERSITY *of* MARYLAND
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
SHOCK, TRAUMA AND ANESTHESIOLOGY
RESEARCH CENTER

Gordon S Smith
Professor
Epidemiology and Public Health
National Study Center for Trauma & EMS
[redacted]
http://medschool.umaryland.edu/orc_trauma_anes/

Births, Deaths, Marriages, and Relationships Registration Act 1995 Review
Department of Internal Affairs
PO Box 805
Wellington 6140
New Zealand

Thursday, 28 April 2016

Re: Review of the access provisions in the Births, Deaths, Marriages, and Relationships Registration Act 1995

Dear review panel

I was fortunate to hear today regarding your solicitation for comments on the Review of the access provisions in the Births, Deaths, Marriages, and Relationships Registration Act 1995. I wanted to give my input as a population health researcher and medical epidemiologist who has worked with health data including birth and death in both New Zealand and the USA.

I have a long history of using administrative health records for public health research with an emphasis on trauma and other injuries. I am especially interested in data linkage as a cost effective means of answering important public health problems that cannot be answered by a single data source.

Compared to the available health data sources here in the USA the New Zealand health registries are far superior and in my opinion a largely untapped resource for improving the health of New Zealanders. The demographic and medical research capabilities of the New Zealand registers is very high, and we are only just beginning to realize their full potential. New Zealand is really a model for how we can do research in other countries. Key to most of these studies is making identifiable data available to researchers for approved research projects.

I applaud you efforts to make data available to qualified researchers with appropriate safeguards to protect the rights of individuals. However I see a huge difference in users between genealogists or family historians and legitimate researchers. I would like to see specific procedures to assist approved researchers and facilitate use of the data for research. Academic research must be approved by the institutions ethics committees to ensure the highest standards are adhered to that protect the rights of individuals. This is very different to most individuals conducting genealogy research.

While I recognize the concerns regarding means to enable the Registrar-General to recover the costs of providing BDM services, the provision of records should not be a profit center. In fact I would encourage these costs to be kept to a minimum for approved researchers, most of who are funded anyway by the same government providing the data. Here in the US the government has a different model and data is provided free of charge to qualified researchers. In fact our health agencies such as the National Center for Health Statistics see one of their key missions is to encourage the use of their data to improve the health of the public. To this end they provide extensive assistance to data users free of charge. I would like to see the same model in New Zealand.

The addition of Soundex searching all registers greatly facilitates linkage and identification of individuals. We find this to be an essential feature that facilitates data linkage.

Cause of death information should be included in records when available without having to purchase individual death certificates.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on your proposals. I would be happy to provide additional information if needed.

Sincerely Yours

Gordon S. Smith, MB. ChB. (Otago), MPH
Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health
National Study Center for Trauma and Emergency Medical Systems
University of Maryland School of Medicine
[redacted]