



# Part 3 of 3: Following birth care

## Implications for practice

The implications for practice listed below are based on the best available evidence. They are derived directly from the synthesised information contained in the systematic review of evidence as well as from expert and consumer representative advice. The implications for practice are intended as a guide to inform healthcare professionals' clinical decision-making in conjunction with their unique context, the preference of their patient and their own expert clinical judgement.

## Caring for own stillbirth

- Parents and other family members, such as siblings and grandparents, may be affected by the stillbirth experience for many years and appreciate healthcare professionals acknowledging this, particularly with regard to providing ongoing care and referrals to other supportive services and groups such as local support groups.
- Parents and family members' unique, individual experiences of grief, loss and other emotions such as anger can be acknowledged as valid and natural by healthcare professionals.
- Parents appreciate being consulted on their preferences on how close they wish to be located to other babies and parents in the hospital following stillbirth; for some parents being near other babies and parents may be distressing, and for others unfamiliar areas of the hospital may be isolating.
- Parents appreciate being cared by health professionals who are familiar with their situation rather than staff who are unaware of their experience which may occur when parents are moved to a different ward. A subtle way to make staff aware of the parents' situation is important; overt door stickers/signs may not be appreciated by all parents.
- Parents may wish to remain in hospital or go home sooner after birth and appreciate being involved in decisions around this. The mothers' clinical condition is also an important consideration.

## Information, support or attention

- Parents may benefit from verbal, electronic as well as written information and support with practical issues such as how to register their baby's birth and how to arrange for a funeral.
- Parents may appreciate information about how to support and talk to their other children and family members.
- Parents may appreciate receiving sensitively delivered information about the emotional, psychological, social and relationship issues they may experience following stillbirth.
- Verbal, electronic and written information, referrals to follow-up care and support from psychologists, social workers, counsellors and peer support organisations may be appreciated.
- Parents may not desire to take up referrals or offers of support immediately. Information to take home and follow-up contact may be appreciated.

## Emotional support

Both parents need emotional support. Parents prefer any communication and interaction with healthcare professionals to be conducted with sensitivity, compassion and empathy. Respect for the situation and parents' emotions and reactions is important. Parents appreciate it when healthcare professionals validate and affirm their feelings as natural and understandable whatever they may be. It is important that parents feel that their role as parents is understood by healthcare professionals.

It is also important to recognise that an entire family is affected by stillbirth. This can be especially true for older siblings and grandparents who also require emotional support and attention.

### Information provision

Parents are rarely prepared for the experience of stillbirth and information provision is critical

Any information – verbal, electronic and written – is appreciated when provided in clear, understandable language and in a step-by-step manner so that bereaved parents are prepared for

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## Information provision and communication

- Parents may be distressed by healthcare professionals who appear disengaged or do not take time to provide information, support and empathetic care.
- Parents should be provided with honest, forthcoming and step-by-step information in advance of each event and procedure.
- Dismissive, blunt, cold or inconsiderately worded communication will distress parents.
- Even small comforting gestures and simple words of sympathy and reassurance can help parents feel supported.
- Parents may wish to understand the cause of their baby's death. Verbal, electronic and written information may be helpful for parents to help them decide whether they would like investigations performed or post-mortem examinations conducted.

## Support and training for healthcare professionals

- Healthcare professionals who attend to parents of stillborn babies may be better able to provide meaningful and appropriate care if they are provided with training and support to develop their knowledge and skills to perform their role as well as to cope with their own emotional reactions.

## Culturally appropriate care

These implications for practice around culturally appropriate care were derived from the perspectives of a limited number of cultural groups only. With consultation with the expert advisory group,<sup>†</sup> these implications however may be appropriate and relevant for people from diverse cultural backgrounds as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Healthcare professionals must be aware that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to providing culturally appropriate care.

- Parents appreciate healthcare professionals who acknowledge, are aware and inclusive of spiritual, religious and cultural beliefs that may be different from their own. For example, parents may have particular needs such as speaking to their baby in their own language or performing important cultural, spiritual or religious rituals while in the healthcare setting.
- Some cultural groups have particular beliefs and practices around death which may impact on their preferences for care. Parents appreciate healthcare professionals being aware of and considering these when providing care.
- Parents may have individual preferences for care that do not necessarily match more general preferences of their cultural, spiritual or religious group. Healthcare professionals must ensure that parents' individual preferences are heard and acknowledged rather than assuming they will

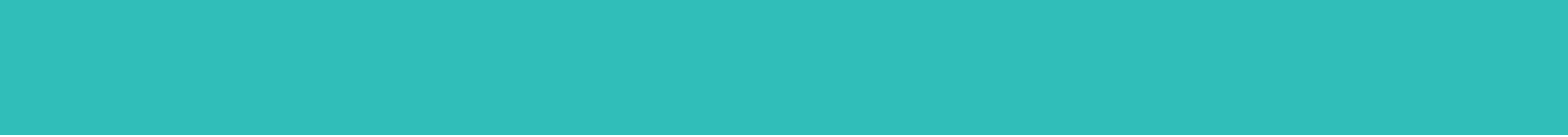
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- Healthcare professionals attending to parents of stillborn babies may be better able to provide culturally appropriate care if they are provided with training and support to develop their knowledge and skills to acknowledge and understand different cultural groups' needs and preferences for care.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may wish to have family members, elders and/or community leaders there to support them through their experience.
- Healthcare professionals may be able to contact specialist services such as Aboriginal healthcare workers and Aboriginal and Maternal Infant Care (AMIC) workers from outside their local healthcare service and area for information and advice when caring for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Healthcare professionals attending to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware of and acknowledge that kinship and family structure is of particular cultural significance. Parents may want family members and/or elders to be there for them to provide support.

For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, mothers assign the 'birth order' to their children. Understanding that a stillborn baby may have a particular place in this birth order and for example may be the mothers' 'firstborn' is important.

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## **Disclaimer**

"The procedures described in this document must only be used by people who have appropriate expertise in the field to which the procedure relates. The applicability of any information must be established before relying on it. While care has been taken to ensure that this document summarises available research and expert consensus, any loss, damage, cost, expense or liability suffered or incurred as a result of reliance on these procedures (whether arising in contract, negligence or otherwise) is, to the extent permitted by law, excluded."