

## **Sands position statement**

### **Shared graves and lockable grave covers**

When a baby dies at any stage of pregnancy or shortly after birth, it is common practice for Trusts and Health Boards to offer to arrange and pay for a funeral service, followed by burial or cremation. Some Trusts and Health Boards that offer burial, use shared graves. This is particularly likely in areas of the UK where burial ground is scarce and burial costs are high.

Sands strongly believes that burial must continue to be an option for all parents. Wherever possible each baby should be buried in a single grave. However, if the cost of single graves is prohibitive, then shared graves must remain an option so that Trusts and Health Boards can continue to offer burial. Some parents find the idea of a shared grave upsetting. Others find it comforting to know that their baby will not be alone.

Shared graves must always be protected by lockable grave covers to ensure that the grave cannot be disturbed until it is full and the ground can be re-constituted. (A lockable grave cover consists of a metal frame bolted into the ground with a strong polypropylene cover that is padlocked to the frame.)

Parents whose baby has died are extremely shocked and grief stricken. It is therefore essential that they receive clear and sensitive explanations of all their options. They should also be informed about what each option involves. In addition parents should be given written information about the choices they can make. They can then decide if they would like the hospital to organise their baby's funeral, or if they would prefer to arrange it themselves.

Some parents who want the hospital to arrange the funeral may, for religious, cultural or personal reasons choose burial. If the grave is to be shared with other babies, parents should, always be told this in advance. They should be told how many babies will be in the grave and given an estimate of how long it is likely to be before the grave is closed and the ground properly re-constituted.

Parents should also be informed in advance of any restrictions there may be. They may not be allowed to place any kind of memorial on a shared grave and they will not be able to open the grave later for example, to move their baby's body to another location. This information should also be included in written information for parents

It is paramount that babies' bodies and remains are always handled with sensitivity and that parents wishes are always respected.