

## **Sands Position statement Bereavement Midwives**

The death of a baby around the time of birth is a devastating bereavement for parents and their families. The care that parents receive cannot reduce their grief but poor care can and does increase it, both in the short and the long term. It is therefore essential that all staff who come into contact with parents are supportive, well informed about parents' possible needs and know what needs to be done. It is also important that all procedures and arrangements are designed to ensure parents receive the best possible care.

Sand believes that it is essential for maternity units to have access to at least one member of staff who has specialist knowledge and training in bereavement care. S/he should have an overview of all the departments that may be involved - from the time a baby's death is suspected to the time the parents leave the hospital, the baby's body is buried or cremated or released to the family for the funeral and post mortem results have been discussed with the parents.

Currently, there is no nationally recognised job specification for bereavement midwives. The hours allocated to this work vary and the role is interpreted in different ways. There are also staff who are expected to fulfil this role in very few hours per week or month, without the title or the appropriate pay grade. Sands believes that bereavement midwives are essential and that, as well as supporting parents themselves, their role should include:

- Being a resource for staff, bereaved parents and their families
- Being familiar with all the policies and protocols relevant to care of parents whose baby dies before, during or shortly after birth
- Ensuring that all protocols are regularly reviewed and up-to date, the relevant paperwork and equipment (such as cameras and equipment to take hand and footprints) are always available and ensuring that staff are familiar with these and know how to use them
- Training and supporting staff who may come into contact with parents at any stage of their care in hospital .This helps to ensures that parents will receive sensitive care when the bereavement midwife is not present and empowers other members of staff
- Organising and evaluating multi disciplinary training sessions to include trainee obstetricians and staff such as sonographers and receptionists as well as midwives
- Helping to ensure high standards of bereavement care in every relevant department
- Liaising with other staff such as chaplains, neonatal /paediatric pathologists and mortuary staff
- Promoting good communication between all relevant hospital departments and primary care staff
- Build working relationships with external bodies such as the registrar of births and deaths, the coroner, local GP practices, funeral directors, crematorium and cemetery managers and Sands
- Ensuring that parents are offered support literature such as the Sands booklets for parents
- Where hospitals offer to arrange and pay for funerals, monitoring contracts with funeral directors, the cemetery and the crematorium and the services they provide.

It is clear that a substantial amount of time should be allocated to this demanding and complex work.