

Sands Position Statement

Storing keepsakes in hospitals

The parents of babies who die before, during or shortly after birth have few if any memories or tangible keepsakes of their baby.

Keepsakes such as photos, hand and footprints, identity bracelets, cot tags, certificates or a lock of the baby's hair help to confirm the baby's existence and can be comforting to families in the months and years to come.

It is therefore essential that hospital staff suggest creating keepsakes and help parents to do so.

Most parents want to take these keepsakes home with them. But although they have agreed to keepsakes such as photos, hand and footprints, some may not want to take them home.

Many hospitals have stored these items in the mother's medical notes. However with the increasing use of paperless notes this may no longer be possible. Instead, Sands recommends placing the items in a sealed envelope which the parents can take home and either store themselves, or give to a trusted person for safe keeping.

If this is done, Sands recommends that it is recorded in the mother's medical notes.

Some hospitals are in the process of digitising electronic notes and are no longer able to store hard copy keepsakes that were created previously. In the interest of transparency and offering parents choice, Sands suggests that hospitals write to the parents involved to ask whether parents would like their keepsakes to be sent to them (giving parents the option of responding to the hospital via email, phone or by letter to make it as easy for them as possible).

Hospitals should also explain that if parents do want their keepsakes to be sent to them, they will be placed inside a sealed envelope marked 'Photographs' or 'Keepsakes' which will be inserted into another envelope, so parents can choose if and when they ever wish to see the keepsakes.

Sands also recommends that these keepsakes are sent via a 'signed for' postal service to ensure safe delivery. In the initial letter, hospitals should also add that if they don't hear from parents, their keepsakes will be stored for the foreseeable future in case parents wish to see them or have them sent later. Sands would also suggest that hospitals acknowledge that receiving this letter may be distressing for some parents and to provide the details of the support offered by Sands in the letter should parents wish to access these resources.

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Improving bereavement care team