

Sands position statement

The Mortuary, and Transfers for a Post Mortem Examination

Transferring Babies to the Mortuary At some point, usually when parents leave the hospital, babies who have died are taken to the mortuary, either for a post mortem or to await collection by the appointed funeral director.

Babies should always be transferred with sensitivity, dignity and respect. Very pre-term babies can be carried in a discreet container of a suitable size (such as a pot). Babies born at a later stage of pregnancy should be dressed and wrapped and carried in a baby carrier or a Moses basket, or in the arms of a member of staff or the family. For more information see the Sands Guidelines for professionals: *Pregnancy loss and the death of a baby*.

Transferring Babies to Another Hospital If a baby needs to be transferred to another hospital for a post mortem, the hospital should ensure that the baby is in a suitable container, for example, a small cardboard coffin, and that an appropriate method of transport is used. Some Trusts use a funeral director or other dedicated vehicle. There must be a system for tracking the location of every baby while they are in transit or in the care of a hospital or hospitals.

3. Reassuring Parents Ward staff should have good working relationships with mortuary staff and preferably know the name of at least one member of the staff. This enables staff to say to parents, for example, “Lydia will be looking after your baby in the mortuary.” Ward staff should also know:

- how babies are cared for in the mortuary and, if relevant, how they are transported to another hospital for the post mortem.
- about security arrangements.
- whether, for example, a light can be kept on at night so a baby won’t be ‘alone and in the dark’ which is something that some parents worry about.

This enables staff to reassure parents with confidence that their babies will be cared for with sensitivity, respect and dignity at all times.

Mortuary Facilities for Parents Visiting their Baby Parents who are still in hospital should not have to visit the mortuary to see their baby. Instead, the baby should be brought to them. Parents who have left hospital can visit to see their baby in the mortuary. There should be a specially-designed room where parents and families can see their baby. Ideally this should be light and spacious and must be comfortable and homely rather than clinical. The baby should be dressed and/or wrapped and in a suitably-sized Moses basket, placed on a stand so that parents do not have to stoop to see their baby. There should be comfortable seating and parents should be given all the time they need to say goodbye to their baby.

If there are religious symbols, they should be relevant to the local population but should be removable and stowed out of sight, so that only symbols appropriate to the visiting family are visible.