

## **Sands position statement**

### **Bereavement care rooms and bereavement suites**

The care that bereaved parents receive in hospital following the death of their baby is crucial. These experiences may be remembered by parents for the rest of their lives, and bad experiences are likely to exacerbate feelings of pain and grief for bereaved parents, potentially for many years to come. Small details can mean a great deal to recently bereaved parents, and the environment in which care is delivered is of particular importance. This is why dedicated bereavement care rooms and suites are a necessity to ensure that parents receive care that best suits their needs.

Ideally, each hospital should have at least one dedicated bereavement care room or suite where parents can be cared for following the death of their baby. These dedicated rooms, used only in cases where parents have experienced or are likely to soon experience the death of their baby, should provide a private and comfortable environment.

The location in which parents receive care is something that can significantly influence their experience. For example, being cared for in an area where they can see or hear other parents and their babies may compound the anguish felt by some parents. The room or suite should be located so that parents and other family members do not have to pass expectant and new parents or babies on their way in and out. If it is not possible to position the room so that the sounds of other parents and babies are unable to be heard, the room or suite should be adequately sound-proofed instead. The room or suite should be positioned so that it is near enough to the labour ward to ensure that the mother receives continuous care and support during labour and birth in circumstances where the baby is known to have died before labour.

It is also important to ensure that the facilities of the bereavement care room or suite meet the requirements of bereaved parents and their families. The door should be discreetly labelled or named so that other parents are not necessarily aware of the room's purpose. The room should be equipped with a double bed, en-suite bathroom and small kitchen area wherever possible. This is to enable parents to spend time in the room with their baby and any visitors, if they would like to do so. A cot or suitable sized basket should be available for the baby. A cooling facility should also be fitted in the bereavement suite, so that parents have easy access to their baby and do not need to go to the mortuary if they would like to see and spend time with their baby.

The location and facilities of the bereavement room or suite should take into account the practical needs of partners or birth partners, who may spend a great deal of time with the mother. This can include providing a comfortable chair in the same room, nearby toilet facilities for both men and women, and refreshment facilities which are available at all times.

Attention should also be paid to how the room is decorated. It should be made to feel both homely and comfortable. Images of families and babies are entirely inappropriate, and should be avoided. As even seemingly minor details can be recalled vividly from a distressing period, well-known images which parents may be likely to encounter again in the future in different circumstances should also not be used. It is good practice to consult bereaved parents, possibly via a local Sands group, when a bereavement room or suite is being planned, so that their feedback can be incorporated into any designs.

Whilst no facilities can lessen the grief and anguish bereaved parents may feel, well-designed bereavement rooms and suites can ensure that appropriate care is delivered in the most sensitive environment possible.

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Improving Bereavement Care Team