

Supporting Muslim Families Through Pregnancy Loss



Birmingham Women's and Children's
NHS Foundation Trust

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Good care cannot remove the pain of loss, but care that is inadequate or poor makes things worse and affects a family's wellbeing both in the short and long term (Sands 2016).



Birmingham Women's Hospital

Birmingham Women's Hospital is a specialist Women's Hospital seeing a wide range of Maternity and Gynaecological patients.

The Bereavement and Spiritual Care Department work closely together in supporting women who have suffered a pregnancy loss. Chaplains are available to patients to give pastoral, religious and spiritual support to all who may need it.

In 2016 we had 177 baby deaths of which 78 had a recorded faith.

A substantial figure of 58% of babies had been recorded as being from Muslim families.

Pregnancy losses in 2016

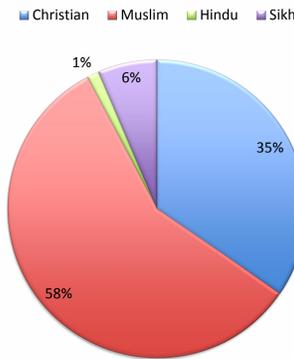


Fig.2 Pregnancy losses in 2016 broken down by faiths recorded

This significant figure shows that there is an increasing need that has driven BWH to address and meet the service users religious and cultural needs appropriately during this crucial time of loss.

Opportunity to reach out and offer support

Our aim was to address a gap that was recognised in our Muslim families' uptake of Bereavement and Chaplaincy support at the hospital. The Muslim Chaplains have worked alongside the Bereavement team and Mortuary staff to tailor the facilities we already had in place to accommodate the cultural and religious needs of these families, and to bring much needed comfort during a difficult time.

What is unique about this service?

- Room with washing and shrouding facilities and a quiet ambient space adjacent to it
- Religious, spiritual and emotional support and guidance for parental involvement
- Ready onsite equipment for last rites enabling an expeditious burial
- High class service of dignity in practice
- Specialist resources
- Graveside prayers with pastoral and confidential support

The Family Quiet Room



The room has a calming ambient space for being present with baby, for family viewing, and for offering heart-moving prayers and ceremonies

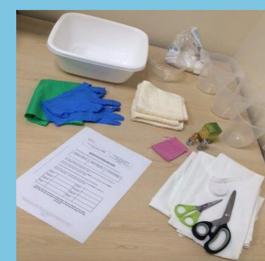
It is also a place where parents may choose to be close to their baby during last rites, should direct involvement in the process be too overwhelming for them.

Muslim Chaplaincy Support



Muslim chaplains offer a religious last rites service performed with the greatest dignity and respect in death of a full-body wash (*ghusl*) and shrouding (*kafan*). They will support and guide parents who wish to perform these essential rites themselves, or wish to participate in part of it. This fosters a feeling of doing and giving on the part of the parent/s in the short span of time they have with their baby, and creates a deep sense of meaning, purpose, and relief.

Expeditious Funeral/Burial



All necessary last rites equipment is ready onsite to prepare baby for a burial to take place as soon as possible, an Islamic requirement.

Full-body Wash/*Ghusl*

This is a religious ritual wash, comprising of ablution, and full body wash using soapy water, clear water and scented water. Schools of thought vary in terms of whether a miscarried fetus should or should not be washed, but there is consensus that if the baby was 120 days gestation or over, and was born alive, that a washing should take place.

There is a specific ritual method of the *ghusl*. Generally an odd number of washes, beginning at the head, then the right side of the body and then the left are performed. Baby bath and shampoo may be used, and traditionally camphor is mixed in the water for the final wash.

Non-alcoholic perfume (*hanoot*) is used too, on the baby and on the shroud.

Shroud/*Kafan*

Unsewn white cotton fabric is used for shrouding, and white cotton tape for the ties.



Shroud cut and laid out

Inner lower sheet izar

Inner upper sheet qamees

Head facing right

Outer sheet lifaafah, with ties

Identification

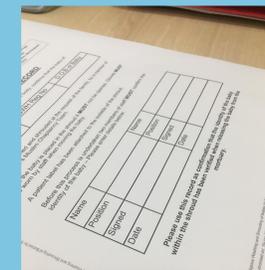


Procedures are in place with our Perinatal Pathology service to ensure that the baby's shroud is not disturbed for the purpose of identification.

The deceased is shrouded without any worldly items and so no objects are placed with the body. To meet the need of this religious requirement, where possible, all items such as umbilical cord clips, cannulas/lines, ID tags are removed.

The ID tag is securely attached to the foot end of the shroud for when leaving the mortuary.

This is also used to indicate the laying of the body in the grave to face *qiblah* (direction of Makkah).



The Identification Document is signed by two members of staff to verify ID of baby.

A very important, specifically designed process and documentation allows identification of the baby without disturbing the shroud, thus respecting the deceased and the religious ritual.

The document stays with the shrouded baby and is used to release the body from the mortuary.

Graveside prayers

Our Muslim chaplains offer funeral prayers at the graveside in exceptional circumstances providing pastoral care and support as needed.

This is particularly appreciated in confidential cases in which a hospital-led funeral with the last rites/preparation of deceased service can remain confidential and as private as possible.

Resources for Muslim Families



Specially designed bereavement cards for Muslim families have been developed; they include a short Islamic prayer to provide spiritual comfort, and can be given out by any member of the teams.

The bottle with the remaining perfume that is used in the washing and shrouding of the baby is enclosed in a soft fabric pouch, and then meaningfully gifted to the family as part of "memory making".

Baby Ava's Foundation provides us with perfume especially for our Muslim families. Families also kindly donate perfume and fabric for the shroud.



By your side