

Worksheet May Help Parents After a Stillbirth

BY DEEANNA FRANKLIN
Senior Writer

BOSTON — There are several ways physicians can offer support to parents after a fetal death, Ruth C. Fretts, M.D., said at a meeting cosponsored by Harvard Medical School and Brigham and Women's Hospital.

She offered suggestions on counseling parents after a stillbirth, including use of a decision support worksheet and a kind of parental bill of rights. (See box.)

The worksheet takes a question-and-answer format and provides space for parents to list their own thoughts and questions. Although answers to the questions may vary by hospital, the questions address general concerns of grieving parents.

The worksheet was originally designed by a social worker in Chicago who had a stillbirth. "When a bad thing happens, all hell breaks loose. It's hard to even think. This is a checklist for the patient to hold, to look at, and to go through. ... And it has a thoughtful approach to the value of an autopsy," said Dr. Fretts, assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology, Harvard Medical School, Boston.

Some questions on the worksheet:

- ▶ What are my options for burial or cremation?
- ▶ Should we see and/or hold our baby?
- ▶ Will pictures of my baby be taken?
- ▶ Will my baby have an autopsy or other tests?
- ▶ Can we have our baby blessed?
- ▶ Will my milk still come in after delivery?
- ▶ We have other children. Should we let them see the baby? What should we tell them?

In Australia, a perinatologist or fetal pathologist usually introduces himself or herself to the parents, expresses condolences, and explains that an autopsy may find out exactly why the baby died. The parents are told their baby will be returned to them and that great care will always be taken. The parents are more likely in this scenario to consent to an autopsy, she said.

The parental bill of rights was adapted from Share Pregnancy and Infant Loss Support Inc., a group that offers support to

individuals who have lost a baby through stillbirth, miscarriage, or newborn death.

The term "bill of rights" is something of a misnomer. According to a statement from Cathi Lammert, R.N., the group's executive director, "The term 'rights' is not used as a mandate for the bereaved nor as a militant statement of demands. It is an affirmation for parents who wish to make decisions based on informed consent and to assume the parenting role in meaningful ways despite the tragic circumstances." ■

Rights of a Parent When a Baby Dies

The following is an abbreviated version of the rights listed in the Share guidelines, which should be tailored to fit state, local, and hospital policies:

- ▶ To be given the opportunity to see, hold, and touch their baby at any time before and/or after death, within reason.
- ▶ To have photographs of their baby taken and made available to the parents, or held in security until the parents want to see them.
- ▶ To be given as many mementos as possible.
- ▶ To name their child and bond with him or her.
- ▶ To observe cultural and religious practices.
- ▶ To be cared for by an empathetic staff who respects their feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and requests.
- ▶ To be with each other throughout hospitalization as much as possible.
- ▶ To be given time alone with their baby, allowing for individual needs.
- ▶ To be given information about the grieving process and support organizations.
- ▶ To have a discussion with the appropriate medical staff on options for an autopsy and other testing procedures.
- ▶ To plan a farewell ritual, burial, or cremation in compliance with local and state regulations and according to their personal beliefs, religion, or cultural tradition.

More information is available at www.nationalshareoffice.com.

**EXCESS MUCUS
DOESN'T LIVE HERE
ANYMORE.**

THE FIRST 12-HOUR TABLET TO TREAT
RESPIRATORY CONGESTION: MUCINEX®^{1,2}

THE ONLY 600 mg formulation to maintain the
therapeutic effectiveness of guaifenesin over 12 hours^{1,3}

THE ONLY immediate/extended release to maximize
consistent delivery with no peaks and troughs^{1,3}

THE ONLY BID bi-layer tablet to enhance
patient compliance^{1,3}

For respiratory congestion...

Mucinex[®]

MUCINEX® IN... MUCUS OUT

References: 1. Mucinex product labeling. 2. Orange Book data. Available at: <http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/ob/obdocs/tempai.cfm>. Accessed October 29, 2004.
3. Data on file, Adams Respiratory Therapeutics, Chester, NJ.

ADAMS
RESPIRATORY
THERAPEUTICS

© 2004 Adams Laboratories, Inc, Chester, NJ 07930 112204 US Pat. 6,372,252 B1