

## **Good Practice Guidelines Death and Dying**

### **Dying**

- If possible, discuss with a patient's family any requirements they may have for the process of death – for example, facing the bed towards Mecca, being visited by their extended family or having prayers said.
- Many complications arise regarding the use of life support. It is a good idea to talk to the patient and their family about any concerns they may have with life support in advance.
- Many people, including those from some ethnic groups, may not want to know if they are dying, or may not want their families to know. If possible, discuss this with the patient, or ask to talk to their community leader, a chaplain, etc.
- The accepted definition of death and when exactly it occurs may vary between groups and even within a group. The use of life-support systems may further complicate this issue.
- Many groups do not agree with organ donation or post-mortems. For this reason, it is not appropriate to talk to the patient or family about these issues unless they feel that they can say 'No' without penalty. It is a good idea to consult a local group about their beliefs in these areas before talking to the patient or their family, or talk to an expert within your organization about how to handle the situation.

### **After Death**

- If possible, leave a light on in the room where a body is lying. Members of many ethnic groups will find this comforting.
- Do not remove jewelry, ritual clothing or items associated with the faith or culture of the deceased after their death. The family may wish to do this themselves.
- Keep a body covered at all times to preserve dignity and modesty. If possible, wrap the body in clean, white cloth until the family can arrange to wash and dress the body themselves.
- Whenever possible, do not touch the body directly, but use gloved hands instead. Some groups do not like to have their dead handled by people from outside their community.
- Unless absolutely necessary, do not wash the body. Friends and family may wish to do this themselves as a last mark of respect for their dead.
- Do not remove any drains, catheters or dressings; in some cultures, the fluid they contain is considered to be part of the body and should not therefore be removed from it after death.
- If there are any open wounds without dressings, make sure they are covered with a light gauze or bandage.
- Some groups may wish to recover the remains of the deceased as quickly as possible for the speedy burial or cremation that is required by their cultures.

- The body may need to be quickly released for transportation to their home country before burial.
- If a post-mortem is required by law, then take the time to explain this gently to relatives, whom might be distressed by what they consider to be desecration.
- If a post-mortem is not required by law, but would be beneficial, then approach this subject carefully; many groups will not permit the deceased to be disturbed in this way, whereas others may give permission if they understand the reasons behind the request.

### **The family**

- Mourning traditions vary considerably. Offer the family and friends of the deceased a nearby room to congregate and grieve in, and allow them to wash and prepare the body, if they wish to do so.
- Some groups may wish to have prayers sung over the body or other religious ceremonies carried out. Accommodate these wishes as far as possible without affecting other patients.

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