

Sensitive management of pregnancy tissue

Introduction

We are sorry that you have had an early pregnancy loss and want you to understand what happens to the pregnancy tissue once it has been passed or removed from your body. You are not obliged to read this information and may simply advise staff of this wish.

What happens to the remains from a pregnancy after early pregnancy loss (pregnancy of less than 12+6 weeks gestation)?

Most of the time, when a pregnancy is lost, it is not possible to see a baby because it has stopped growing at such an early stage.

Pregnancy tissue may be sent to our pathology laboratory to be examined but not all will be preserved for examination. If no baby (fetus) is seen and the tissue is not sent to our pathology laboratory, it will go to the mortuary where it will be blessed in a non-denominational blessing by the hospital chaplain, before being incinerated.

If, when you lose your pregnancy, a baby is visible to the naked eye or under the microscope; it is sent to the mortuary by the pathology staff. It would then be blessed and placed in a small casket. Caskets may contain up to five such pregnancy losses and caskets would then be cremated. This takes place approximately once every three months. Following cremation the ashes will be scattered in the memorial garden at West Berkshire Crematorium. Unfortunately, due to the small size of the baby, no ashes can be recovered for you to keep after a cremation. In this trust, AB Walker Undertakers provide this service for free prior to cremation at the West Berkshire Crematorium, Bath Road, Thatcham RG19 4LD.

Why might it be necessary for the hospital to keep some tissue from my pregnancy?

On occasions, it may be necessary to examine tissue that has arisen from the loss of a pregnancy under a microscope. This may allow us, for example, to confirm that a pregnancy had indeed begun to grow in the womb before it miscarried or provide information about placental growth which may be useful for your care.

Once tissue has been examined, the microscope slides and preserved blocks of tissue will be stored in the hospital archive as part of your hospital notes.

Can I take the pregnancy tissue home with me?

You have the right at any stage, up until the pregnancy tissue has been disposed of, to request the remains of your pregnancy to take home with you.

If you do so, you have a legal obligation to comply with certain rules and regulations about burial on private land or disposal by any other means. We will ask you to sign a form to release any tissue from the hospital, confirming that you will dispose of it lawfully.

You should understand that if tissue preserved as a block or slide has been returned to you; while efforts will be made to remove the preservative solution, it will still contain a substance potentially harmful to health (formaldehyde). This means that not only must it be disposed of safely but it may not deteriorate for many years. We should also emphasise that once released from the hospital, these slides will no longer be an accessible part of your patient record for future reference.

Further information

We hope this information has been useful. If you wish to discuss this further with a member of staff, please let us know.

A trained member of staff is available 24 hours a day on Sonning Ward (telephone 0118 322 7181) should you have further questions or concerns.

HTA (Human Tissue Authority) – www.hta.gov.uk

This document can be made available in other languages and large print upon request.

For more information about the Trust visit our website www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Department of Gynaecology (EPU), September 2019

Review due: September 2021