

If you are reading this you have suffered the loss of a loved one. This pamphlet was designed in an attempt to help you and your family in some way through this very difficult time. The pamphlet contains some information about what you need to organise now that your loved one has died as well as some information which is hoped will be of help to you in the near future.

### **Post-mortem (autopsy)**

A post-mortem is required by law if your loved one died a sudden, unexplained death or died due to unnatural causes, such as a motor vehicle collision. A post-mortem is a careful examination of the internal organs and tissues of the body with the hope that this will give a better understanding of the cause of death. If you want to understand better how or why your loved one died you can contact the police mortuary where the post-mortem will be carried out. Ask for the contact details of the pathologist who performed the post-mortem to discuss the findings. Once the post-mortem is complete you can arrange for the funeral home of your choice to fetch the body of your loved one and go ahead with the funeral or memorial service.

*If for religious reasons you need to have the post-mortem completed as quickly as possible, please make the hospital staff aware of this.*

Please remember that the police mortuary is part of the justice system and not the health system. The environment and the approach of the staff should be seen in this context.

### **Legal requirements**

There are a number of legal requirements which you will have to deal with during this difficult time. To either bury or cremate your loved one you have to:

- Get their identity document and any funeral policies they have.
- Get the identity document of the next-of-kin arranging the funeral or cremation.
- Get the name and contact details of the attending doctor.
- If you will be cremating your loved one, additional forms need to be filled in by the doctor.
- Obtain a form from the state mortuary to release the body after

the post-mortem to give to the funeral home and get a post-mortem number.

- Obtain a death certificate from the Department of Home Affairs which they will issue after having received documentation from the mortuary.

The next-of-kin needs to go to the Department of Home Affairs with the deceased's identity document, as well as their own. They also need to have the post-mortem number. The next-of-kin will then be issued with a death certificate which is required by the funeral homes. Check with the mortuary when you should go to Home Affairs as this is usually a few days after the death.

### **How to contact the hospital**

The name of a staff member whom you can contact at the hospital should you have any questions about your loved one while they were in the hospital is:

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Please do not hesitate to contact them with your queries, however small.

### **Funeral homes**

If you don't know the names and contact details of funeral homes ask the hospital staff to provide you with the information. These funeral homes can then assist you with the necessary funeral arrangements.

### **What to expect with your emotions**

At times you will find it very difficult to believe that your loved one has died. You may feel very angry and depressed and want to cry all the time. You may feel very isolated and alone or have feelings of helplessness. After the death of a loved one it is important to remember not to compare your grief and feelings with that of others. Every person responds differently. Don't think that there is something wrong if you don't react in the way that you or others think you should. If after about a year you are feeling no better please contact a counselor or friend.

### **Looking after yourself**

During this difficult time try to remember to eat a well balanced diet and try to get enough rest. If you have trouble sleeping make sure you get moderate exercise or try other measures to help you sleep. After the death of a loved one it is important to find someone to talk to, especially your family and friends. Ask the

hospital staff for details of counselors or psychologists whom you might approach for help. If you attend church remember to ask for support from your minister. Here are some people that might help:

### **The Compassionate Friends**

031 – 4631890 or 0827747053

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## **DEALING WITH SUDDEN BEREAVEMENT**

**A guide for families who's  
loved one dies an unexpected  
death**