Only One Chance to Get it Right: The Myths and Facts of Post Mortem Care and Funerals
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Objectives

• Address your needs and expectations – a quick participant “survey.”

• Guidelines for helping families select a funeral home.

• Overview of normal and expected post mortem changes.

• Overview of the “traditional” and “nontraditional” funeral.

• Take away one thing to immediately apply in your own practice setting.
A Funeral Is . . .
Today, A Funeral Is . . .

• A milestone rather than an end point
• More consumer-oriented
• Personalized
• More likely to offer options
How does a family select a funeral home?

- Your role in guiding families
- Interview the funeral home
- Visit the funeral home establishment
- Seek referrals from families who have used their services in the past
- Obtain a copy of the General Price List and ask what are their service offerings
- Traditional Funeral Home vs. Direct Disposition Company
- Body Donation
What Does a Funeral Director Do?
Funeral Director’s Role

- Cares for families and loved ones
- Helps families plan a meaningful service
- Understands requirements of religious traditions
- Knows regulatory requirements
- Works within families’ financial means
- Offers grief recovery services
- Provides event planning for nontraditional services
Training Requirements

- Degree from specialized mortuary college or university program
- State and national board exams
- State-specific licensing
The Funeral Process

1 – Removal
2 – Embalming and preparation
3 – Arrangements
4 – Service
5 – Burial or cremation
Removal

1. Funeral home dispatches representatives to the home or care facility.
2. Representatives visit with family (if present).
3. Representatives may place identification.
4. Representatives take loved one into the care of the funeral home.
Service Options

- Traditional funeral, including visitation and committal service
- Graveside service
- Memorial service (before or after burial/cremation)
- Direct burial/direct cremation
Regulations

- Federal Trade Commission
- State and local regulations
- Scattering restrictions
- Transportation of cremated remains
- Burial restrictions
Normal Postmortem Physiological Changes

- Rigor mortis
- Algor mortis
- Liver mortis
Rigor Mortis

- Muscle contraction, immobilization of joints
- Begins approximately 2-6 hours after death
- Begins in involuntary muscles (heart, GI tract, bladder, arteries) and progresses to voluntary muscles, including eyelids, head and neck, trunk, and lower limbs
- A function of muscle mass – persons with large muscle mass more prone; frail, ill cachectic person less so
Rigor Mortis – Implications for Post Mortem Care

- Natural and temporary post mortem change
- Positioning of the person immediately after death will not impact on his/her appearance long-term
- Position to convey comfort and peacefulness
  - Close eyes (sometimes petroleum jelly can help)
  - Position the person with head on a pillow or on his/her side so the jaw closes
  - Fold hands
- Normalize and reassure the family
Algor Mortis

• Cooling of the body

• Once circulation ceases internal body temperature drops by approximately 1.0 degree C or 1.8 degrees F per hour until it reaches room temperature

• Changes in skin elasticity and tone

• With high fever at time of death changes are more pronounced and the person may appear to perspire after death
Algor Mortis—Implications for Post Mortem Care

- Reminding families about the changes and suggestions for touching the person
- Careful with skin, removing and applying tape, repositioning and skin traction
- Normalize and reassure the family
Liver Mortis

- Post mortem decomposition
- Natural breakdown of red blood cells, release of hemoglobin that stains the vessel walls and surrounding tissues
- Appears as mottling or bruising in dependent areas of the body or at sites of skin breakdown
- Often becomes extensive in a short period of time
- The remainder of the body develops a gray hue
Liver Mortis – Implications for Post Mortem Care

- Prop the person up with pillows under the head and shoulders or raise the head of the bed 30 degrees or so.
- Remove heavy blankets and clothing and cover the person with a light blanket or sheet
- Normalize and reassure the family
Final Thoughts about Post Mortem Care

• Preparing the person for the funeral home – what are your practices?
  – Bathing?
  – Dressing?
  – Special family ritual? Cultural considerations?
  – Removal of tubes

• How long can a body stay in the home?

.....And always remember, we often only have one chance to get it right!
Our sincere thanks ----
Questions?

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