

Pathology Examinations for Pregnancy and Newborn Loss

Information for Parents and Loved Ones

**University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences
Departments of Pathology, OB/GYN, Pediatrics (Neonatology),
and Arkansas Fetal Diagnosis and Management**

Our programs would like to provide you with some information about the types of examinations we can perform in order to determine potential causes for your loss.

We want to take a moment to again tell you how sorry we are for your family's loss. We recognize that this is an extremely sad time for you. We are committed to supporting your family during this time. Do not hesitate to ask for help if you need it.

Many questions arise after the death of a baby. Why did this happen? Will it happen again? The answers to these questions vary from family to family. They may affect the way that you grieve your loss. They may also have implications for future pregnancies.

The decision to have examinations of your baby's body can be very difficult. You may find others trying to influence this decision as they try to "spare" you additional pain. Our experience, and medical research, indicates that many parents regret the decision not to have further evaluations done. Determining potential causes and risks for recurrence may aid in your grieving process.

It is very important that you know that these examinations will not compromise your ability to have ongoing contact with your baby. They will not interfere with any religious needs and services that you plan for your baby. There are different types of examinations that we can provide and some may fit your family's needs and wishes better than others.

Definitions:

You may hear different words used to describe examinations done after someone has died. These include **autopsy, post-mortem examination and pathology examinations**. Some of these are very specific in their meaning. We prefer to use **pathology examination**, because it covers a variety of types of evaluations that may prove to be helpful. These examinations are performed by trained medical specialists (**pathologists**) who have experience specifically with babies. They are done at UAMS and Arkansas Children's Hospital.

Types of Examinations:

You should be offered a choice of these examinations if your baby died after birth or if your baby died after reaching the 20th week of your pregnancy and weighs more than 350 grams. Even the limited or focused examinations will likely provide some information about the cause of the death and/or the chances of recurrence in the future. Remember, however, you can certainly choose to decline any/all of these examinations.

- **Full Examination:** This examination will include reviewing the relevant medical, pregnancy and family histories of you and your baby. Additional blood tests may be ordered from you, the placenta, and the umbilical cord to help rule out genetic conditions, infections, and other disorders. The placenta will also be examined fully. The pathologist will examine the external features of the baby's head, face, neck, chest, back, abdomen, limbs and genitalia. Photographs and X-rays may be taken, especially of any abnormal or unusual features or birth defects. Internal examinations of the abdominal, chest and head organs are performed as well. This does involve making incisions, or cuts, which will be repaired after the examination is complete, just like in surgery. Organs are weighed and examined. The baby's face, hands and limbs are never cut. A full examination may also involve sending small samples of organs/tissue for examination under the microscope. Other special tests might be necessary or desired too.
- **Limited Examination:** After reviewing all of the important medical histories, this examination is restricted to only certain parts of the baby's body. For example, it may include a thorough external examination, but only examining the internal organs of the abdomen or of the head. These limited examinations can be handled in almost any way that the parent wishes or solely based on what your obstetrician or pediatrician recommends to you.
- **External Examination Only:** This examination is restricted to external examination of features of the baby's head, neck, face, chest, back, abdomen, limbs and genitalia. Photographs and X-rays of certain areas, or particular birth defects, may be taken. Blood samples from the umbilical cord and tissue from the placenta may be used for genetic and infection studies.

Results:

The results of the pathology examinations are compiled into a detailed report. Depending on the type of examination performed, initial results may be available in 2–3 days. A full report, however, will often take 6–8 weeks. When a report is finished, it will be shared with you and your family in a manner that you wish. Many families will wish

to schedule an appointment with us to review the results. We can also make sure that the results are sent to your primary care provider.

Consent:

No examination will be performed on your baby without your written consent. A nurse, doctor, genetic counselor or social worker is available to discuss all of these options in more detail, so that you may give informed consent.

Burial / Memorial Services:

We will work with your chosen funeral home/parlor to arrange for the baby to be transferred to them after the examinations are complete. This occurs relatively rapidly. If you are not choosing to have a memorial service or burial in your hometown, UAMS can arrange for cremation and disposition. You have the option of receiving the remains.

Cost:

If you are a patient at UAMS and your loss occurred after 20 weeks into the pregnancy and weighs more than 350 grams, or after your baby was born, there is no charge to you for these examinations.

Again, we recognize that you are experiencing a lot of intense emotions at this time. We do not wish for this information to overwhelm you. We do feel it is important for you to know all of your options with regards to pathology examinations, so that you can choose what is right for your family. Do not hesitate to ask any of us for more information or further discussion at any time. You may also call the ANGELS program at **1-866-273-3835** for more information.