

New guidelines to help families impacted by stillbirth

September 2 2014, by Kate Bourne

The quality of care being provided to families affected by stillbirth is set to improve across Australia following new research by the University of Adelaide's Joanna Briggs Institute.

In a project funded by the Stillbirth Foundation Australia, researchers at the Institute have conducted a review of worldwide research into how families experience care provided by [healthcare professionals](#) after stillbirth.

This work has resulted in a new series of guidelines aimed at assisting doctors, nurses, midwives and others in providing the best possible care to families.

"Stillbirth is a devastating experience for [parents](#) and families. Despite the prevalence of stillbirth, our research suggests that healthcare professionals are often not well trained or prepared to provide the level of care needed for families during such a tragic event," says Associate Professor Zoe Jordan, Director of Communication Science with the University's Joanna Briggs Institute.

"Our research confirmed that the actions, behaviours and communications of healthcare professionals during their interaction with parents, and the stillborn baby, can have a considerable impact on parents' psychological wellbeing."

Associate Professor Jordan says parents are at heightened risk of

detrimental psychosocial effects, including grief, depression and self-blame following stillbirth. "Healthcare professionals may themselves be emotionally affected by stillbirth, and this can influence their interaction with parents," she says.

The research findings show that parents are most comforted by healthcare professionals who are prepared to involve them collaboratively in decision-making, and who provide empathetic, sensitive and respectful care at all times.

Jan Samuels, CEO of the Stillbirth Foundation Australia, says: "The systematic review carried out by researchers at the University of Adelaide's Joanna Briggs Institute provides meaningful and useful information that can immediately be translated into practice.

"With six babies being stillborn every day in Australia, it is critical that parents, and the health professionals who care for them, are well supported. We see this study as an important addition to our body of knowledge on the impact of stillbirth on families."

The guidance documents and full report will be available this month on the [Stillbirth Foundation Australia](https://www.stillbirthfoundationaustralia.org.au/) website and will be communicated with relevant groups and associations Australia-wide.

Provided by University of Adelaide

Citation: New guidelines to help families impacted by stillbirth (2014, September 2) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-09-guidelines-families-impacted-stillbirth.html>

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