

Case Study: Jewish Woman has a Stillbirth at 28 Weeks in the Hospital

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A 34-year-old Jewish woman who is twenty-eight weeks pregnant arrived at the hospital with bleeding and cramps. An ultrasound showed no heartbeat and confirmed that fetus had died in utero. The doctor explained that labor would be induced, and the woman would deliver a stillborn baby. She alerted the hospital chaplain to prepare to discuss burial options. After the delivery, a nurse wrapped the fetus in blanket and asked the patient if she wanted to hold and name the stillborn baby as a way to say goodbye.

The patient and her partner became quite agitated when they were asked the baby's name. They did not want to see the baby and were deeply uncomfortable with all offers to memorialize the experience.

Reflection:

- What is the status of a fetus and an infant under seven days old in Jewish tradition?
- What are some Jewish cultural norms around pregnancy?
- How can the caregivers support these grieving patients without referring to the stillbirth as a baby?
- What are some alternative ways to help the parents mourn beyond traditional memorializing and burial rituals?
- How does the women's Jewish identity frame her approach to stillbirth? Would it be the same for a miscarriage?
- What are some ways the caregivers could learn about the needs of this patient given the diversity of approaches in Judaism to mourning rituals?

Additional Resources:

Cozen-Harel, Jill. "How Jewish Rituals Helped Me Mourn My Miscarriage," Forward 25 October 2019, <https://forward.com/life/433663/how-jewish-rituals-helped-me-mourn-my-miscarriage/>

Jager, Rae Hoffman. "There Was No Jewish Way to Mourn Stillbirth — So We Created Our Own," Kveller 16 May 2022, <https://www.kveller.com/there-was-no-jewish-way-to-mourn-stillbirth-so-we-created-our-own/>



Redshaw M, Hennegan JM, Henderson J. Impact of holding the baby following stillbirth on maternal mental health and well-being: findings from a national survey. *BMJ Open*. 2016 Aug 18;6(8):e010996. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2015-010996. PMID: 27540097; PMCID: PMC5013511.

<https://www.thememorygarden.org/about>