



**PRESS RELEASE**

**UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 00:01 ON THURSDAY, 16 MAY, 2013**

**Sands, the stillbirth and neonatal death charity, responds to a new study led by Dr Sudhin Thayyil and Professor Andrew Taylor based at UCL (University College London) and Great Ormond Street Hospital, on post-mortem MRI: a viable alternative to an autopsy.**

Sands, the stillbirth and neonatal death charity, welcomes the findings of this important new study. We hope it will lead to post mortem services that better meet the needs of bereaved parents.

With 4,000 stillbirths and a further 2,500 deaths of babies under four weeks old every year in the UK, the quality of post mortem services affects a huge number of families. At present well over half of parents (55% of parents whose baby is stillborn and 80% of parents whose baby dies neonatally) refuse consent to a post mortem of their baby, despite evidence that post mortem investigations provide new and useful information in the majority of cases. For too many parents the potential benefits of autopsy are outweighed by their distress and concerns about the process. Health professionals too find seeking consent for post mortem one of the most challenging aspects of their work in caring for bereaved parents.

Charlotte Bevan, Sands Senior Research Officer, who consented to a post mortem for her own daughter when she died shortly after birth, said, "Consent for post mortem by definition has to be sought in the early hours after a baby's death. In a state of shock and grief parents are asked if they will consent, and while they desperately want answers about why their baby died, many simply cannot contemplate what a post mortem entails and therefore refuse to go ahead."

"Giving parents the option to have a less invasive but equally informative investigation, will not only make the decision easier for parents, but could lead to an increase in post mortem up-take and vastly improved research into why so many babies are stillborn or die shortly after birth."

“With 17 babies dying every day before or shortly after birth in the UK, we look forward to seeing this option for autopsy being made available to all bereaved parents as soon as possible. Equally important is the need to reduce the unacceptably long time parents have to wait for post mortem reports which currently can take as long as 3 months.”

-ends-

**Note to editors:**

For more information, interviews, or to speak to a parent case study, contact Lisa Wardle, senior press officer at Sands, on [lisa.wardle@uk-sands.org](mailto:lisa.wardle@uk-sands.org), or telephone: 0203 598 1942.

**Key Information about Sands:**

Sands, the stillbirth and neonatal death charity, was established by bereaved parents in 1978 and obtained charity status in 1981.

Sands core aims are to:

- Support anyone affected by the death of a baby;
- To work in partnership with health professionals to improve the quality of care and services offered to bereaved families; and
- To promote research and changes in practice that could help to reduce the loss of babies' lives

Sands is a national organisation, with around 100 regional support groups across the UK.

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