

## HOW DO DIFFERENT CULTURES CARE FOR THEIR DEAD?

In different societies and cultures over thousands of years, people have individually initiated different methods to deal with the post-mortem changes that occur in their deceased loved ones. The methods employed have ranged from mummification through to the technical process of 'cryogenics'.

All methods have been utilised for religious and cultural reasons.

Today in Australia, many funeral directors offer professional embalming as part of their regular service, as it is currently the most advanced method of caring for the physical and chemical changes affecting society's deceased.

## HISTORY OF EMBALMING IN AUSTRALIA

Professional embalming has been carried out in Australia for well over one hundred years. In recent times it has become more widely accepted by the general public and the funeral service profession due to the vast improvements in mortuary science and embalming education and broad-reaching professional standards. Embalmers undergo an intensive training program in order to become qualified practitioners. Members of the AIE are bound by a strict Code of Ethics, and subscribe to the following principles:

- That the practice of professional embalming is in the interest of public health and will promote embalming to the best of their ability.
- Treat all human remains with respect and dignity.
- Guarantee a completely confidential relationship • with those they serve.

The Institute promotes and implements minimum post-graduate requirements of a practising embalmer.

## YOUR RIGHT TO CHOOSE

At the time of death, there is a transfer of responsibility, trust and faith from the bereaved family or responsible person to the funeral director. As this transfer is taken very seriously by funeral professionals throughout Australia, so too is the family's right to choose the type and level of service given to the deceased.

The embalming of the deceased will need to be authorised by the bereaved family. As religious and or cultural practices may dictate that embalming is not necessary or desired, other situations such as extended viewing times, extended time period prior to final disposition, and inter- or intra-state or foreign repatriation of the deceased may see the need for embalming.

Professional embalming is one level of service that funeral directors can offer to bereaved families. Open dialogue between family members and the funeral director concerning embalming is encouraged, enabling everyone involved with the funeral the opportunity to provide the deceased with the highest level of dignity and respect.

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# EMBALMING



## The Art and Science Of Embalming

The ancient art of embalming arose among the Egyptians over 4,000 years ago from a widespread faith in some type of immortality and bodily resurrection. As time progressed, the Egyptians had many imitators from Burma to Persia; from Bolivia to the United States; from the Canary Islands to the people of the Torres Straits and right here in Australia. Out of this faith arose the practice of embalming.

Today, we embalm our dead for reasons that are directly associated with the psychological well being of the bereaved, and with a responsibility to the health of the general public. The purpose of this small booklet is to explain in a straightforward way why embalming has become a modern, viable science.

### **WHAT IS AN EMBALMER?**

An embalmer is a person who has attained qualifications specific for embalming, currently Certificate IV Funeral Services (Embalming). An embalmer is usually a member of a funeral firm, charged with the responsibility of the preparation and embalming of deceased persons for the funeral and burial or cremation.

Only after extensive theoretical and practical training can an embalmer possess the required knowledge and qualification in physiology, anatomy, chemistry, biology and other areas that will equip him or her to carry out the complex procedures required.

An embalmer has the technical skills to embalm a deceased person and can also undertake complex reconstructive work, necessary when a deceased person has been physically traumatised prior to death. Techniques similar to surgical procedures can achieve the complete embalming process.

### **PSYCHOLOGICAL VALUE OF EMBALMING**

Research into the psychological process of grief has confirmed that the one most important single therapeutic event of the entire funeral process is the

moment of truth — when the living mourners confront the body of the one they mourn.

Proper preparation and, when necessary, restoration help to minimise the marks of violence or the ravages of disease.

Preparation, restoration and the use of cosmetics are not meant to make the dead look alive or simply asleep. They provide an acceptable image for recalling the deceased.

### **WHAT IS EMBALMING?**

Put simply, embalming is a process similar to surgical procedures that achieves three things:

1. Sanitisation of the body
2. Presentation of the body
3. Preservation of the body

This is achieved by treating all parts of the body with various chemicals. The process utilises the vascular system of the body as the vehicle for distribution of fluids to the tissue bed. Other procedures are used to treat organs and external features paramount in the mind of the embalmer.

Every human body that is cared for by the qualified embalmer is embalmed or prepared to achieve the best results for the intended presentation and final disposition or transportation. Embalming or preparation of a human body does not permanently preserve the deceased person.

### **WHY EMBALM A DECEASED PERSON?**

We need to embalm and prepare deceased persons:

- In order to satisfy requirements for transferring a body by air, sea or other long distance transportation.
- To enable others to handle a deceased person without the risk of infection or contamination.

- To prepare a base, by firming tissue, so that reconstructive and cosmetic work can be carried out.
- To remove excess fluids that may otherwise seep from the body and to ensure that normal excretion of fluids and faecal material is prevented.
- To enhance the appearance of the body and thus return the deceased person to a more natural presentation for family and friends.
- To ensure the temporary preservation of the deceased so that the funeral need not take place immediately.
- To try to remove the devastation caused by many long-term diseases and illnesses.
- To help minimise the results of trauma, chemotherapy drugs and the removal of visible post-mortem changes that may have begun to appear.
- To meet state regulations (where applicable).

### **HOW DOES EMBALMING TAKE PLACE?**

The body is injected with special fluids that achieve all of the things mentioned above. The selection of the right fluid concentration, amount and type is a matter of professional assessment, but all of the tissues of the body need to be permeated with the fluid. The fluid is generally formaldehyde based. The chemicals used in the embalming operations are potentially dangerous and require expert handling.

### **WHY VIEW A DECEASED PERSON?**

It has long been recognised that when a death occurs it can be beneficial to view the dead body to assist in the acceptance of that death. This is possibly more important when the death has been sudden, remote or more traumatic.

Not everyone wants to view, but the most important aspect is that the opportunity is given to family and friends.