

The information provided in this brochure is intended for high school leavers or those who are interested in working in the funeral industry as an embalmer.

There is much to be said about pursuing a career in funeral service. It is a great profession that serves people during one of the most difficult times of their life. Embalming is one aspect of funeral service.

Anyone considering a career in funeral service must understand all the aspects of the profession. This is a profession that must be available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 365 days per year. We do not control when someone dies. This means that someone from the funeral home (and in some cases, the embalmer also) is always on call, uses a pager, and is interrupted on holidays and other special events of their personal life. This is the life we choose and sign up for when we go into funeral service.

It must be remembered that each deceased individual we prepare is someone's loved one; a father, mother, child, sister, brother, or other dear family member or friend. We must treat each one of these individuals as though they were a member of our own family and maintain a sense of dignity for them. We respect the deceased and their family by giving them our best effort every time and seeking help when we need it. The reward is when the family comes in to view the deceased for the first time after the death and compliments the work you have done. The highest compliment you can be paid is when a family that had initially decided to leave the casket closed now chooses to leave it open. The work of the embalmer will be with the family and friends forever in memories of the last time they saw their loved one during the funeral.

What is embalming?

Put simply, embalming is a process similar to surgical procedures, which achieves three things: sanitisation; presentation; and 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.

What is an embalmer?

An embalmer is a person who has attained qualifications specifically for 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 them 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.

Embalmers come into direct contact with the body. They are exposed to blood and body fluids and infectious diseases such as AIDS, Hepatitis B and C, and Creutzfeldt-Jacob Disease. Various causes of death will be difficult for some people to see. Trauma, motor vehicle accidents, child deaths, cancers and the list goes on. For those who feel they want to ultimately be an embalmer, they will need to be able to face the challenges of the types of cases described here. It is not glamorous and requires hard work. Embalmers do not get to pick and choose what kind of cases they will work on. You must be willing to put in whatever time is necessary for each case and have a sense of desire to put forth your best effort.

What does an embalmer actually do?

An embalmer is qualified to preserve the body and the appearance of the deceased. Embalmers preserve bodies from the time of death until they can be buried or cremated.

As an embalmer, your work with the deceased would include:

- washing and disinfecting bodies to prevent deterioration and infection
- removing fluids and gases from the body and replacing them with injected preservatives
- washing and arranging hair and application of cosmetics
- restoring the appearance of bodies after injury

Your duties would also involve:

- working closely with funeral arrangers to make sure the families' wishes are met
- keeping the mortuary clean and enforcing health and safety regulations
- making sure the mortuary is fully stocked
- ordering essential items, such as chemicals
- completing the necessary paperwork required

With some employers, embalming is part of funeral directing work.

What skills do I need to be an embalmer?

- sensitivity to other people's feelings
- a responsible and dignified approach to work
- self-motivation with the ability to work alone
- a strong stomach for dealing with unusual sights and smells
- the ability to follow strict health and safety guidelines
- steady hands for delicate work
- the ability to pay close attention to detail
- an understanding and respect for different religious beliefs
- an interest in science, particularly chemistry and anatomy
- the ability to handle tools and surgical instruments

What training and qualifications are available?

Certificate IV in Embalming is designed to reflect the role of employees working in the field of embalming, including Embalmers and Mortuary Supervisors.

A prerequisite of the course is that each participant must have:

- A fully qualified mentor (Certificate IV in Embalming or equivalent)
- The mentor must be currently practising as an embalmer
- The mentor/student must have access to an appropriate mortuary

Certificate IV in Embalming is not available Australia wide at any public institution. Two private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), both based in Melbourne (VIC) do offer the certificate and a handful of students graduate each year.

A Diploma of Mortuary Management is also available and this qualification provides the skills and knowledge for an individual to be competent in a range of management activities requiring planning, implementing and monitoring mortuary practices and procedures. This qualification requires knowledge and application of funeral services industry protocols when dealing with the deceased.

Can I study by Distance Education?

Some subjects are available to study by correspondence, contact an RTO to find out more information.

What will I earn?

While there is an Award which applies to the funeral industry in the majority of States and Territories, individual companies have different remuneration levels and many pay above Award rates. Details are available on the Australian Government's Workplace Authority website.

What should I do next?

Many people have a strong desire to serve others through work in the funeral industry. However, it is a very difficult industry to enter – many companies are family businesses with a stable team of mature staff, which means that vacancies arise only very rarely.

Seeking employment in the funeral industry is just as challenging as any other career, therefore we suggest that you compile a comprehensive resume and submit it to funeral homes in your preferred area. You may wish to refer to our website to find a list of AFDA Members.

Monitor the careers section of local and state wide newspapers for any job advertisements listed or check out the usual job placement search engine websites. The Australian Institute of Embalming lists vacant positions on their website.

How do I arrange work experience?

Due to the sensitivity of issues surrounding death, the desire to professionally care for clients and their loved ones, and privacy and confidentiality concerns, occupational health and safety including infection control issues, many funeral homes do not accept work experience placements. You should make your own enquiries.

The Australian Institute of Embalming

To assist with your education we recommend initially becoming a Student Member of the Australian Institute of Embalming (AIE). This will give you the opportunity to network with other embalmers and take advantage of the continuing professional development provided by the Institute. Upon completion of your studies, Full Membership can then be obtained.

Additional Resources

Australian Funeral Directors Association 1300 888 188
www.afda.org.au
Australian Institute of Embalming 03 9859 5722
www.aieptyltd.org

Registered Training Organisations

Funeral Industry Development Australia 03 8327 0055
www.fida.com.au
Mortuary & Funeral Educators 03 9569 5013
www.mfe.com.au

Job Search Facilities

Seek www.seek.com.au
My Career www.mycareer.com.au
Career One www.careerone.com.au
Australian Job Search www.jobsearch.gov.au

Other Resources

Australian Apprenticeships 13 38 73
www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au
Service Industry Skills Council www.serviceskills.com.au
National Funeral Services Training Package www.ntis.gov.au
Workplace Authority 1300 363 264
www.workplaceauthority.gov.au

So you want to be an embalmer

A guide for school leavers and new entrants to the funeral industry



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