



The Meaning of Food *and* Multicultural Implications *for* Perinatal Palliative Care

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The loss of an infant is unexpected by parents, whereas the loss of grandparents, parents and even siblings are outcomes adults come to expect. We once heard a Chinese American nurse comment that, “White hair should not bury dark hair.” This sentiment sums up the feeling that perinatal death is a death out of order.

The Committee on Fetus and Newborn of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP; Barfield & Committee on Fetus and Newborn, 2011) defines perinatal death as a fetal death after 20 weeks gestation or a live birth with only brief survival. The purpose of this article is to raise awareness about the meaning of food and feeding during an infant’s end-of-life, and to delineate cultural and religious differences in perinatal death and dying. Clinical implications to help guide practice in the palliative care of infants will also be discussed.

Abstract: Feeding an infant is a bonding experience for parents, particularly for women from cultures in which breastfeeding is the norm. When an infant is unexpectedly ill, or his or her life is expected to be brief, challenges surrounding infant feeding can occur. Regardless of ethnicity or culture, parents facing the death of their infant have difficult decisions to make and need time to process those decisions. Given the social, cultural and spiritual nature of food and water, withdrawing or withholding nutrition and/or hydration for infants can be one of the most difficult decisions for parents. This article considers the clinical and cultural ramifications of infant feeding decisions when a shift occurs from curative interventions to palliative care. DOI: 10.1111/1751-486X.12204

Keywords: artificial nutrition and hydration | breastfeeding | cultural competence | infant feeding | palliative care



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