

Stillborn Babies Incinerated by Hospitals, Investigation Shows

The bodies of stillborn and miscarried babies have been incinerated by National Health Service hospitals in the U.K., a Channel 4 investigation has found.

Monday's *Dispatches* program reported that some NHS hospitals burned the remains of the babies alongside medical waste.

Over 15,000 human remains have been incinerated over the last two years, it said.

The program also found evidence of some hospitals using the remains in "waste to energy" incinerators.

Commenting on the lack of respect for human life, NHS England's medical director, professor Sir Bruce Keogh, says methods other than incineration "offer more dignity in these sensitive situations."

Sands, a stillbirth and neonatal death charity, comments, "The death of a baby at any stage of pregnancy is a major bereavement with lifelong consequences."

Following the revelations about the practice, Dr. Dan Poulter, a health minister, says he had asked Sir Bruce to write to hospital trusts "to make it clear that it must stop now."

According to the program, some parents were not consulted about what they wanted to happen to their baby.

The investigation was presented by Amanda Holden, who has herself suffered both a stillbirth and a miscarriage.

Sir Bruce says that while incineration is not illegal in

England, existing guidance “makes clear that the practice is inappropriate.”

Poulter, who described the actions as “totally unacceptable,” commented, “The chief medical officer has also written to the Human Tissue Authority to ask them to make sure that there is clear guidance on this issue.

“While the vast majority of hospitals are acting in the appropriate way, that must be the case for all hospitals, and the Human Tissue Authority has now been asked to ensure that it acts on this issue without delay.”

Sands says, “Research has shown that the stage the pregnancy has reached when the baby dies is not an accurate predictor of the length and depth of the grief the parents will experience.”

“The care that parents receive cannot lessen their pain, but poor and insensitive care can and does make matters worse both in the short and the long term,” it adds.

Sands also notes that the term *foetus* should not be used, as “from the day the pregnancy is confirmed,” the parents “are expecting a baby.”