

# Death and Dying for the Greek Speaking Community

## Palliative Care

- The preferred place of treatment is the home, if possible.
- An Orthodox priest is usually an integral member of a palliative care team caring for an Orthodox individual
- Family members (especially spouses and children) play an important role in care of the dying person and want to be involved in making decisions
- Health professionals should involve, get to know and be able to contact the priest and family members
- Distress and pain are generally expressed openly and with much emotion



## Prior to Death

- The priest should be summoned to the side of the dying person
- The priest will administer Holy Communion

## After Death

- Call the priest if he is not already there
- Rites of the Body
  - There is a short (10 min) service after death performed by an Orthodox priest
  - The body is washed in oil and wine
  - The body is dressed in a burial shroud under other attire
  - Last farewell procession is performed
  - The body is considered sacred and is traditionally buried (cremation may be considered if the family so wishes, however burial is the only option allowed by the Orthodox authorities and the priest would not conduct the committal part of the burial at a crematorium).
  - At the funeral parlour, the body is placed facing east to represent Christ's resurrection
  - A vigil may be held at the home of the deceased or funeral parlour prior to the funeral
  - Before the funeral the deceased may be displayed in an open coffin for family and friends to offer last respects
- After the death, it is respectful and still very traditional for the family to wear black. It is worn for up to 40 days, or even one year.



It is important to establish each person's wishes in the event of palliative care or death and recorded as part of the care plan.

## **Sources**

'*Multicultural Palliative Care Guidelines*', Palliative Care Council of SA Inc,  
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'*Greek Culture Profile*', Diversicare 2006

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Foundation Aged Care Training Institute, Conference Report 2002