

## **Prevention and control of infection by cadavers in grief care in the Japanese community**

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Worldwide efforts have been made to control the spread of infection at medical institutions and other associated facilities. Most efforts have been made to protect staff and patients but there is little recognition of the danger of infection to living persons from cadavers or the need for such measures. In the fields of legal medicine and psychology where autopsies are often performed, the risk of infection from the cadaver is recognized. Infection to living persons such as doctors and funeral home staff is reported and strict preventative measures are in force. In Japan in 2001 the most common place of death was the hospital (81.2%) followed by the home (13.5%) and others (5.3%). Recent changes to medical insurance, however, mean the number of people cared for in the home will increase. Thus the number of deaths in the home is set to increase along with the need for preventative measures to stop the spread of infection. After a doctor confirms the death, nurses give the remains a bed bath and pack cotton balls into the body cavities such as the mouth, noses and anus to stop leakage of blood and body fluids, and unpleasant odours. However, leakage cannot be completely prevented so recently post mortem treatment products are often used, such as a special gel which absorbs and coagulates body fluids. (Embalming is expensive in Japan and not widespread.) Then nurses change the corpse's clothing before the onset of rigor mortis. A cadaver bag is not used. The influence of Buddhist ceremony in the washing of a dead body to purify remains can be seen. However the human body is host to many microorganisms, e.g. respiratory (*tuberculosis etc.*), blood borne (*hepatitis B, hepatitis C, HIV*), gastrointestinal (*rotavirus diarrhea, salmonellosis, escherichia coli etc.*) (Figure1) and transmission of infection agents from the remains to a living person may occur. Thus there is a risk to the nursing staff at the hospital and home, family and friends, porters, funeral directors and mortuary staff particularly because in Japan 90% or more corpses are cremated more than 24 hours after the death is confirmed. Usually the family stays in the same room with the remains until cremation, touching or viewing the body. Present funeral customs put the family, friends, and funeral home staff at risk of infection. Therefore it is necessary to put preventative measures in place, and create a safe environment for grief care.

