WHENUA/PLACENTA MANAGEMENT (of disposal)

AUTHORITATIVE SOURCE:
Code of Health and Disability Commissioner Act 1994
Human Tissue Act 1964
Human Rights Act 1993
Protection of Personal and Property Rights Act 1988
Treaty of Waitangi Act 1991

AUTHOR:
Midwifery Educator

PURPOSE:
To optimise culturally safe and appropriate practices of whenua/placenta management or disposal for health professionals, the childbearing woman and her whanau/family.

SCOPE:
All health professionals involved with whenua/placenta management, following the birth of a baby, whether a live or stillborn infant. This may include Lead Maternity Carers (LMCs), staff in the Maternity unit, Emergency Department, Intensive Care unit, ward 8 or Theatre.

DEFINITION:
Whenua /placenta/afterbirth – Whakahokia tou whenua ki Papatuanuku kia tiakina ai ia ta matou uri

A large glandular organ approximately 18cm in diameter and 2.5cm thick, which grows in the uterus along with the baby during pregnancy and is attached to the baby by the umbilical cord. Its main functions are to provide the fetus with the essentials for survival.

POLICY STATEMENTS:
1. All women and their whanau will be given the choice of possession and after care of the whenua/placenta following the birth of their baby.

2. All women will have their choices of whenua/placenta management discussed in the antenatal, intrapartum and postnatal periods, and their wishes will be documented accordingly within their birth plan and subsequent clinical records.

3. The midwife/nurse/obstetrician is responsible for examining the whenua/placenta and membranes following the birth to check whether it appears to be complete and documenting accordingly.

4. Following checking of the birth plan and verbal confirmation of desired management, the whenua/placenta will be either:
a) Given to the woman/whanau double bagged in waterproof material and inserted into the specific whenua/placenta paper bag by the midwife/nurse responsible for her care, with the woman’s identification label and the baby’s date of birth on the bag, prior to being returned to the woman/whanau along with the information sheet Appendix 1. Be aware that whanau may have their own container for storage of the whenua. **Wherever possible, whanau will be encouraged to take the whenua/placenta home within 24 hours of the birth.**

b) Sensitively disposed of - double bagged in waterproof material and inserted into the specific whenua/placenta paper bag by the midwife/nurse responsible for her care, clearly labelled with a red ‘placenta for disposal’ sticker with the woman’s identification label and the baby’s date of birth on the bag, and taken to the Mortuary freezer by an orderly for subsequent disposal. This will be documented as appropriate within the clinical notes.

For women who choose not to keep their whenua/placenta, but wish to know how it is disposed of, they should be informed that it will be placed in an appropriate storage container and will be disposed of sensitively at a later date. The information that could be provided is:

In a situation where the woman/whanau SPECIFICALLY REQUEST more detailed information about the disposal of the placenta, this information may be shared with them:

- The whenua/placenta is wrapped firmly in appropriate waterproof material and then wrapped in a brown paper bag; the bag is labelled with the mother’s label/NHI number and the baby’s date of birth. **The bag should have a red sticker on ‘placenta for disposal’.**
- The whenua/placenta is collected by the orderly staff who make a collection daily between 0700 and 1000hrs, and get a member of midwifery/nursing staff to sign that it has been collected.
- The bagged whenua/placenta is placed in the freezer in the mortuary along with other human tissue that is to be disposed of.
- On a monthly basis, the freezer is cleared out and the contents blessed by the hospital chaplain before collection by Evans Funeral Service.
- The whenua/placenta is then cremated.

c) Temporarily stored if requested as the woman lives out of town and no-one is able to take the placenta/whenua for storage within 24 hours of birth. It will be double bagged in waterproof material and inserted into the specific whenua/placenta paper bag by the midwife/nurse responsible for her care, clearly labelled with a green ‘placenta for collection’ sticker, with the woman’s identification label and the baby’s date of birth on the bag, along with the whenua/placenta release form (Appendix 2) and the letter signed by the woman that she will take the placenta/whenua home on discharge/within seven days (see Appendix 1), and placed in short-term storage in the designated chiller in maternity **(NOT FREEZER).** A note will be put onto the whiteboard in the maternity office clearly stating that the woman will be taking the placenta/whenua home on discharge, and the responsibility for ensuring that this happens, rests with the LMC or core midwife on the day of discharge. **If it has not been collected by the 7th day following birth, contact will be made, by maternity staff, with the woman/whanau to request collection, and such calls documented in the clinical records.** If it is not collected
within seven days, it is to be placed in the mortuary freezer with a red ‘placenta for disposal’ sticker attached over the green sticker, and a copy of the signed letter attached for information.

Placenta/whenua for histological examination

In some clinical circumstances it may be recommended to send the whenua/placenta for further investigation to Auckland. Please see separate guideline Perinatal Post-mortems and Whenua/Placental Histopathology.

ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS:
Care of Human Tissue (including care of deceased): TDH Organisational Policy
Informed Consent: Hauora Tairāwhiti Organisational Policy
Maternity guideline – Perinatal Post-Mortems and Placenta//Whenua Histopathology
Appendix 1 - Information sheet
Appendix 2 - Disposal of whenua/placenta
Appendix 3 – Whenua/placenta release form

EVALUATION METHOD
Monitoring of complaints associated with the management of the whenua/placenta, and feedback to staff and women of any recommended actions taken.

Date of Approval: 17/03/2017
Next Review Date: 17/03/2020
Appendix 1

Information for women requesting Hauora Tairāwhiti to temporarily store their whenua/placenta

Date:

Dear

You have requested that Hauora Tairāwhiti temporarily store your whenua/placenta as you live out of town and are not able to transport it home within 24 hours.

It will be placed in the designated maternity chiller for the duration of your stay in maternity.

On discharge from the unit, you will be expected to take your whenua/placenta home with you for appropriate disposal.

If for any reason you do not remove the whenua/placenta when you go home, we will try to make contact with you to request collection within 7 days. If you do not collect the whenua/placenta following this, it will be sensitively disposed of.

I have discussed this letter with the woman
Signed (LMC/staff member):
Date:

I understand and agree to the information contained in this letter
Signed (woman):
Date:

Woman’s contact details (please complete):
   Home telephone:
   Mobile tel:

One copy of this letter is to be placed on the placenta/whenua bag whilst in storage, and one copy is to be given to the woman.

IF the placenta/whenua is not collected as above, a copy of this letter will be attached to the bag and it will be marked ‘for disposal’ and sent to the mortuary freezer. This letter is also to be placed in the woman’s clinical records.
Appendix 2

**DISPOSAL OF WHENUA/PLACENTA**

*Kia ora*

We at Hauora Tairāwhiti recognise and support your choice to dispose of your whenua/placenta. This information sheet is to let you know what the required guidelines are for disposal. Please note that the whenua/placenta is human tissue and will decay rapidly if it has not been preserved. It needs to be stored accordingly.

**Burial:**

You may choose to bury the whenua/placenta in the following places:

- At a public cemetery;
- At a family/whanau cemetery;
- At your home;
- Or some other area that you or your family believe is acceptable for this purpose.

The whenua/placenta must be buried at a depth where it will remain safe from being accessed by animals or accidently exposed. *The recommended depth is 1m or more.*

**Cremation:**

Please contact your local funeral director to organise the cremation of the whenua/placenta.

**Health and Safety:**

We strongly recommend that the whenua placenta is not handled in any way as it may be:

- Contaminated due to disease; or
- Submerged in formalin; or
- Any other reason that will be explained to you by your midwife.

**Hospital Disposal:**

The hospital will contact the local funeral directors to collect and dispose of the whenua/placenta along with other whenua/placenta that are for hospital disposal.

**Containers:**

The whenua/placenta will be given to you in appropriate packaging

**PLEASE LET THE MIDWIFE KNOW IF YOU HAVE YOUR OWN CONTAINER**
Appendix 3

WHENUA/PLACENTA RELEASE FORM:

Date: ____/____/____  Time: __________

LMC contact details:

Patient label

Relative Collecting Whenua/Placenta:

Name: ____________________________________________
Address: _______________________________________
Phone: _________________________________________
Relationship to Woman: _____________________________
Signature: _______________________________________

I, the above named, accept full responsibility for the appropriate disposal of the above person’s whenua/placenta as required by law and have the authority to accept such responsibility.

Whenua/placenta witness and released by: ___________________________

Designation: ___________________________

Date: ___________________________