



**Montgomery County Palliative Care and End of Life Coalition**

**January 16, 2024 Webinar: After a Loved One Dies – Funeral Planning and Other Practical Next Steps to Consider**

**Presenter – Christopher Palmer**

**Funeral and Body Disposition Options - Summary**

<b>Funeral Type</b>	<b>Body Disposition</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>Most Common Approaches</b>		
Immediate Burial - deceased is buried shortly after death.	No embalming or cremation	Preferred method for some religions and cultures
Direct Cremation – performed immediately after death using incineration (also called flame cremation).	Flame cremation uses high heat (1900 degrees Fahrenheit).	Ashes available within days for service, burial or disbursal.  Price for direct flame cremation typically ranges from \$400 to \$1000. <b>Note:</b> If the services of a funeral director are also requested, additional costs are incurred.
Conventional (sometimes called “Traditional”) – often involves a series of events managed by a funeral director and cemetery to honor and remember the deceased person. Services can include embalming, a viewing or wake, a funeral service, burial, and a reception or gathering.	Typically involves embalming and burial vault.	No Maryland law requires embalming. Some funeral homes offer alternatives to embalming (i.e. refrigeration) to slow decomposition for a viewing. Many cemeteries require the addition of a burial vault or grave liner for placing casket and remains in ground. Prices vary considerably and can be more than \$10,000 depending on services requested from funeral home and cemetery.
Donate to Science – remains are given to a medical or research institution. Organs or entire body are used for training and research.	The Anatomy Board assumes immediate custody of the body, so a funeral service with the body present is not possible. However, the family may elect to have a memorial service at any time and the Board holds an annual Memorial Service for all donors.	Many medical institutions cover the costs associated with donation process.
<b>Environmentally Friendly Alternatives</b>		
<i>Green/Natural Burial – deceased is placed in a biodegradable container or fabric shroud. This is the Gold Standard of Environmentally Friendly Alternatives</i>	<i>No embalming or cremation. No burial vault or grave liner. Body decomposes in ground naturally.</i>	<i>Green burial ground or hybrid cemetery (conventional cemetery with portion of land set aside for green burials). Cost estimates \$4,000 - \$10,000. For more expensive green burials portion of cost goes to land conservation.</i>

		<i>Green burial is legal in Maryland as well as all other states.</i>
<i>Natural Organic Reduction (NOR) – also called human composting.</i>	<i>NOR turns human remains into soil through microbial decomposition.</i>	<i>Soil available for service, burial or disbursal within 6-8 weeks of death. Costs is typically \$7000.  Legislation is pending in Maryland to legalize NOR.</i>
<i>Alkaline hydrolysis (also known as water cremation)</i>	<i>Body is sealed in container with heated solution of 5% alkaline. The remains are reduced to bone.</i>	<i>Ashes are available within a few days for service, burial or disbursal. Typically costs under \$7,000.  Water cremation has a smaller impact on the environment than flame cremation.  Legislation is pending in Maryland to legalize Alkaline Hydrolysis.</i>

**Resources:**

[Cultural Guidelines for Working with Families Who Have Experienced Sudden and Unexpected Death](#), University of Missouri, Disaster and Community Crisis Center, October 2014

[Death and Dying – How Different Cultures Deal with Grief and Mourning](#), The Conversation, January 25, 2023

[8 Tips for Funeral Planning](#), AARP, December 2021

[5 Ways to Reduce Funeral Costs](#), AARP, December 2023

[Funeral Consumers Alliance of Maryland and Environs \(FACME\)](#)

[Green Burial Maryland](#)

[Maryland Department of Health, State Anatomy Board](#)

[Maryland Department of Labor, Office of Cemetery Oversight](#)

[Federal Trade Commission – Shopping for Funeral Services \(series of articles/tip sheets\)](#)

[Order of the Good Death – Bill of Rights](#)