

STATEMENT

No. 11/05
August 5, 2005

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

Statement Regarding the Death of a Mother in Landau/Isar

We feel deep sorrow and grief at the loss experienced by the dead woman's husband, children, parents, relatives, and friends. We hope that the close bonds of association within the local congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses will serve to ease their pain. Practical help is being provided.

We also feel profound sympathy for the hospital staff, who were subject to considerable emotional stress.

With regard to the tragic death on July 16, 2005, the media reported nationwide about the religion of the deceased mother and her stand regarding the transfusion of blood.

On the evening before giving birth to her second child, the young mother went to the district hospital of Landau. Members of staff were familiar with the contents of her Advance Medical Directive, wherein the mother excluded any homologous blood transfusions because of her own conscientious decision. In harmony with the Holy Scriptures that teach Christians to 'abstain from blood,' the patient personally rejected this particular treatment, although she was willing to accept other medical procedures. God's Word states in Acts 15:20, 28, 29: "For the holy spirit and we ourselves have favored adding no further burden to you, except these necessary things, to keep abstaining from things sacrificed to idols and from blood ... and from fornication. If you carefully keep yourselves from these things, you will prosper." The doctors responsible had assured the patient of their ability to treat her in accordance with her religious views.

Unfortunately, bleeding set in. According to recent statistics in Germany 6.8 mothers per 100.000 die while giving birth, bleeding being one of the three main causes (*Das Hebammenbuch, Lehrbuch der praktischen Geburtshilfe.*) Regrettably, despite employing various measures, including two operations, the doctors could neither stop the bleeding in time nor locate its cause promptly. There is no basis for the claim in the media that a blood transfusion could have saved the woman's life. This becomes particularly clear when seen against the background of a similar tragic case in Baden-Wurttemberg in 1991, in which one of Jehovah's Witnesses died despite massive blood transfusions.

Each one of Jehovah's Witnesses considers life to be a gift from God and therefore treat it with great respect. The Bible teaches according to James 1:17: "Every good gift and every perfect present is from above." For this very reason, Jehovah's Witnesses carefully seek qualified medical help. The deceased woman did just that. To our deep regret the outcome was a tragic one.

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Fact Sheet

Jehovah's Witnesses and Blood-Free Treatment in Germany

- During the 1980's, Jehovah's Witnesses began an arrangement called *Hospital Information Services* and formed *Hospital Liaison Committees* worldwide to facilitate blood-free treatment for patients. Up to the present, these services are available in 150 countries, working in cooperation with more than 120,000 experienced doctors; about 5,600 of these doctors are in Germany.
- When planning for an operation, Jehovah's Witnesses can normally choose between several teams of doctors. Competent medical care is also assured in emergency cases. Members of a Liaison Committee become involved *only* upon the wish of either the patient or the doctor. They exercise no influence whatever over the conscientious decision of the patient, and they fully respect the relationship between doctor and patient.
- The fatality rate is calculated on the basis of 100,000 live births. Maternal mortality in Germany amounts to 6.8 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants. For several years the major causes of maternal deaths have been: infections (25 %), late gestosis (15 to 20 %), and hemorrhage (10 to 20 %). Mändle, Opitz-Kreuter, Wehling: *Das Hebammenbuch, Lehrbuch der praktischen Geburtshilfe*, 3rd edition, Stuttgart 2003, p. 756.
- "A clear-cut alternative, of either treatment with blood or death, arises very rarely. This alternative should therefore not be the major consideration when operating on Jehovah's Witnesses. Far more important is that emphasis be placed on medical aspects, which, when applied consistently, help avoid exactly these final conflicts of conscience. ... In all 25 abdominal operations on Jehovah's Witnesses we used no blood. None of the patients died; we observed under conditions of mechanical ventilation a minimal value of 1.8 g/dL hemoglobin. ... An allogeneic blood transfusion is certainly much more rarely of vital necessity than is generally assumed. U. Kania et al., „Verhalten bei Operationen von Zeugen Jehovas“, *Chirurgie und Recht*, R. Häring [Hrsg.], 1993, pp. 144-154.