



*GUIDELINES FOR THE
PRACTICE OF BRIT
MILAH:*

January 2016

Produced by
The Initiation Society Working Group on Medical Standards in Brit Milah

How The Recommendations were created

Although standards for practice of *Brit Milah* have been published and updated for more than a century, the Initiation Society President, Dr Shalom Springer, identified that a fuller set of modernised guidelines are needed to formally cover all aspects of *Brit Milah*, including areas such as governance. It was agreed that all existing guidance would be reviewed and new guidelines would be developed.

Therefore in 2014, Dr Springer convened a guidelines development group which included members of the Initiation Society Medical Board, other senior *Mohelim*, both medically and non-medically qualified, and a representative of Milah UK. He invited Professor Goldin, an internationally recognised medical expert, to lead the group which numbers 11 people.

The first task was to identify the areas where guidelines were needed. Members were tasked to review existing documentation and to define the scope. The key areas were defined as including the workings of the Society, training of *Mohelim*, child safety, the procedure itself and wider governance issues.

As *Brit Milah* is primarily a religious practice, there is relatively little evidence published in the general medical literature on these aspects of the topic, despite the fact that the procedure is so well established. The group therefore met and decided to create its guidelines by following a Delphi process. This is a well-recognised way to achieve consensus, particularly in areas where the quality of medical evidence to underpin guidelines may be variable. It has been used by the National Institute for Clinical and Healthcare Excellence (NICE) for this purpose. Professor Lovat led the Delphi process for the Society.

The medical literature was reviewed and a series of quality statements was developed. A Delphi decision aid tool (<http://armstrong.wharton.upenn.edu/delphi2/>) was used which allowed for anonymous voting on each statement. Scores between 0 (strongly disagree) and 10 (strongly agree) were allowed. Members were permitted to make comments to help refine the statements. A statement was included once 80% of the group voted strongly in favour, with a score of 8/10 or more. Other statements were refined until the required agreement was reached. The final key statements are included in this document. *[Before formal publication the document will be reviewed by senior legal peers who are expert in this field].*

A separate document is being developed alongside this one which includes the evidence underpinning the quality statements that were developed. This document forms an important part of the overall guidelines as some of the issues will require more detailed explanation than is possible in a brief set of statements.

The Initiation Society is committed to reviewing this document regularly so that it remains a living reflection of best medical practice, which will, inevitably, develop with time. The aim is to ensure that *Brit Milah* in the UK is performed in accordance with guidance from our Rabbis and with these guidelines, recognising that both the guidance and the guidelines place the health of the baby as the Society's central concern.

Names and affiliations of all members of the Standards Working Group

Professor Robert Goldin, MD FRCPATH MEd

Clinical academic specialising in gastro-intestinal pathology at Imperial College

Dr David Louis Hibbert, BSc, MB, CHB, DCH, DRCOG, FP Cert, MRCP

Qualified as a *Mohel*, in xxxx, xx years experience

General Practitioner and Medico-legal examiner/advisor

Professor David R. Katz, MBChB, PhD, FRCPATH

Co-Chair: Milah UK.

Professor of Immunopathology (Emeritus) University College London; Panel Chair, Medical Practitioner Tribunal Service; Deputy Chair, Medical Academic Committee, British Medical Association; Executive Chair, Jewish Medical Association UK; experience in both Research and Clinical Ethics; co-Chair, Milah UK

Mr Jeremy Leigh, LLB (Hons)

Qualified as a *Mohel*, in 2003, 12 years experience

Professor Laurence B Lovat BSc (Hons) MBBS PhD FRCP

Qualified as a *Mohel* in 1988, 27 years experience

Member of the Medical Board, Initiation Society

Professor of Gastroenterology & Biophotonics,

Head, Bloomsbury Campus, Division of Surgery & Interventional Science, University College London.

Honorary Consultant Gastroenterologist, University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Mr Dov Olsberg, FCA

Qualified as a *Mohel* in 1980, 35 years experience

Chartered Accountant, own practice as general practitioner.

Dr Benjamin Schreiber, MBBS, MA, MD, FRCP.

Qualified as a *Mohel* in 1996, 19 years experience

Consultant physician working at the Royal Free and specialising in Pulmonary Hypertension and Rheumatology

Rabbi Elimelech Schwartz

Qualified as a *Mohel* in 1999, 16 years experience

Rabbi of Congregation Tchabe and Principal of Techabe Kollel in North London.

Dr Joseph Spitzer, FRCGP.

Qualified as a *Mohel* in 1981, 34 years experience,

Medical Officer of the Initiation Society since 2003

General Medical Practitioner and Honorary Senior Clinical Lecturer.

Dr Shalom Springer, BSc in Mathematics, PhD in Mathematical Physics

President of the Initiation Society

1 The Society

1.1 Organisation of the Society

- 1.1.1. The Initiation Society should set and maintain standards for acceptable practice when a registered *Mohel* undertakes a circumcision, whether as a Jewish religious *Brit Milah*, or on a non-Jewish baby
- 1.1.2. The Society should have a medical board to oversee and enforce medical standards
- 1.1.3. The Society should ensure appropriate training and registration of *Mohelim*
- 1.1.4. The Society should monitor practice and revalidation of *Mohelim* including organising regular in-service training courses and issuing annual certificates of fitness to practise
- 1.1.5. The Society should have a robust and transparent system for managing complaints
- 1.1.6. The Society should have a defined process for ensuring compliance of *Mohelim* with the Society's rules and regulations
- 1.1.7. The Society should have a defined process for reviewing new legislation and other guidance in relation to medical practice and deciding how these relate to the practice of *Brit Milah*
- 1.1.8. The Society should publish an annual report

1.2 Applying Standards of Care Equally

- 1.2.1 The Society should ensure that all *Mohelim* apply the same quality standards for all circumcisions undertaken

1.3 Organisational Environment

- 1.3.1 The Society should have a syllabus of training which encompasses the diversity of knowledge, skills, training and attitudes that *Mohelim* are required to have
- 1.3.2 The Society should ensure that the same quality standards are applied wherever practicable to both medically qualified and non-medically qualified *Mohelim*
- 1.3.3 The Society should set out personal and professional development needs where necessary and agree plans with individual *Mohelim* for these to be met

1.3.4 The Society should advise minimum advisable standards for the environment in which the *Brit Milah* is to take place

2. The *Mohel*

2.1 Before commencing training

- 2.1.1 The student *Mohel* must be approved by the London *Beth Din* (Rabbinical Court) and registration board as a person fit to undertake the practice of *Brit Milah*
- 2.1.2 Before commencing practical training the student *Mohel* must obtain a DBS clearance certificate
- 2.1.3 The student *Mohel* must demonstrate immunity against hepatitis B before any physical contact with babies. In practice this means that the *Mohel* may observe but not be actively involved with a *Brit Milah* until after he has finished an immunisation course and demonstrated immunity. He must demonstrate that he maintains immunity long term

2.2 Training

- 2.2.1 The student *Mohel* must become competent in all practical aspects of *Brit Milah* including surgery, consent, communication with parents and awareness of legal requirements. The student *Mohel* must also study theoretical aspects including *Halakhic* knowledge, surgical anatomy, safe use of anaesthesia and analgesia, hygiene and child protection
- 2.2.2 The student *Mohel* must keep a training log
- 2.2.3 The student *Mohel* must pass a medical examination, a *Halakhic* examination and a practical examination before being qualified to perform *Brit Milah* unsupervised

2.3 Contact Details

- 2.3.1 The *Mohel* must inform the Society of his full contact details including name, address, phone numbers, email address and any relevant personal website. He must also promptly update the Society of any changes to these details

2.4 Personal Hygiene

- 2.4.1 The *Mohel* must wash his hands with bactericidal soap and dry his hands on a clean towel before touching a baby at any time

2.5 Use of Medical Substances

- 2.5.1 A *Mohel* who is not medically qualified must not use any drugs, dressings or other medical substances except those approved by the Society and contained in its published list

2.6 Health of the *Mohel*

- 2.6.1 The *Mohel* must not have any contact with a baby nor undertake any procedure if he is or believes he may be becoming ill in a way which will or may affect the health of the baby

2.7 Record Keeping

- 2.7.1 Documents the *Mohel* makes (including clinical records) to formally record his work must be clear, accurate and legible. The *Mohel* should make records at the same time as the events he is recording or as soon as possible afterwards.
- 2.7.2 The *Mohel* must keep records that contain personal information about clients, colleagues or others securely, and in line with any data protection requirements
- 2.7.3 Circumcision records should include:
- demographic details of the child and contact details
 - relevant medical history and examination prior to circumcision
 - operation notes
 - information given to care givers and details of communication
 - decisions made and actions agreed
 - who is making the decisions and agreeing the actions
 - details of any drugs and dressings used or advised
 - any recommendations, investigations or treatment
 - who is making the record and when

2.8 Other duties of the *Mohel*

- 2.8.1 The *Mohel* or student *Mohel* should hold valid professional indemnity cover
- 2.8.2 The *Mohel* must adhere to the Halakhic rulings accepted by the Society
- 2.8.3 The *Mohel* should uphold the values of Judaism and the Initiation Society
- 2.8.4 The *Mohel* must stop practising where there is a change in his own health which might affect performance or pose risk to babies or their families
- 2.8.5 The *Mohel* must make a report to the Medical Officer as soon as practical where he believes that a complication may have occurred, where he has any other concerns about the safety of a circumcision, whether carried out by himself or someone else or where he reasonably anticipates that an incident may be reported to the Society

3. The Child

3.1 Consent

- 3.1.1 The *Mohel* must make a best interests assessment and be satisfied that in the religious and cultural context circumcision is appropriate
- 3.1.2 The *Mohel* must obtain written informed consent before performing the circumcision
- 3.1.3 In order to facilitate communication between the Society and the family, for example, to allow accurate recording of procedure related complications, the *Mohel* should request consent from the parents for electronic storage of personal and procedure details and details of any complications in any electronic database which may be maintained by the Society in line with legal requirements such as the Data Protection Act

3.2 Communication

- 3.2.1 The *Mohel* should offer the baby's carers clear, consistent verbal and written information and advice throughout all stages of the circumcision process. This should include the risks of bleeding and surgical site infections, what is done to reduce them and, if complications occur, how they are managed

3.3 Confidentiality

- 3.3.1 The *Mohel* must respect the confidentiality of the family and in particular must not share any medical information he may receive without express consent of the baby's parents, unless this disclosure is in the best interests of the child

3.4 Child protection

- 3.4.1 The *Mohel* must be aware of child protection procedures
- 3.4.2 If a *Mohel* is concerned that a child is at risk of abuse or neglect, he must inform the Medical Officer in the first instance for advice on how to escalate that concern

3.5 Assessing the health of the child

- 3.5.1 The *Mohel* must assess the health of the child to ensure that he is fit for circumcision. This includes taking a thorough history and physical examination of the baby
- 3.5.2 The *Mohel* must not perform a *Brit Milah* in instances of any concerns about the baby's health, until authorisation has been given to the baby's parents/legal guardians by the doctor caring for the baby
- 3.5.3 The *Mohel* must not perform a *Brit Milah* in the following circumstances:
- Any baby weighing less than 2.5 kg
 - When the baby has jaundice unless it is minimal and resolving
 - Blood dyscrasias (for example haemophilia, von Willebrand's disease, other clotting factor deficiencies etc.), until deemed safe by an appropriate hospital consultant
 - Family history of bleeding disorders until it has been established by an appropriate hospital consultant whether or not the infant has inherited the condition
 - Congenital disorders of the penis including hypospadias, congenital chordee or deficient shaft skin, such as penoscrotal fusion or congenital buried penis, unless advised that it is safe to do so by an appropriate hospital consultant
 - Until the baby has received vitamin K in accordance with standard practice in newborn care

4. The procedure

4.1 Preparing for the *Brit Milah*

- 4.1.1 The *Mohel* should ensure that the proposed venue is suitable for the procedure
- 4.1.2 The *Mohel* should advise parents to ensure the baby is clean in preparation for the procedure
- 4.1.3 The *Mohel* should give parents specific instructions on what the baby should wear that is appropriate for the procedure, and that provides easy access to the operative site, whilst being sympathetic to family traditions
- 4.1.4 The *Mohel* should advise the parents to have infant paracetamol suspension available to give to the child if he is distressed, and advise on the correct dose according to the baby's weight, in line with the dose schedule published by the Initiation Society

4.2 Hygiene

- 4.2.1 The operating team, which means the *Mohel* and any assistants, should remove hand jewellery before operations
- 4.2.2 The *Mohel* should ensure that his clothes, including any *tallit* (prayer shawl), are clean and kept well away from the surgical field

4.3 The Procedure

- 4.3.1 The *Mohel* must perform the *Brit Milah* under conditions of good illumination and at a height at which he can work comfortably and safely. He must satisfy himself before he starts the *Brit Milah* that the location is adequate to meet these needs
- 4.3.2 The *Mohel* should use appropriate measures to minimise any possible pain and discomfort both during and after the procedure
- 4.3.3 The *Mohel* must use sterile instruments that are either disposable or that have been vacuum autoclaved. When using vacuum autoclaved instruments, the *Mohel* must keep records demonstrating sterility
- 4.3.4 The *Mohel* must prepare the skin at the surgical site immediately before incision using an antiseptic (aqueous or alcohol-based) preparation: povidone iodine or chlorhexidine are most suitable
- 4.3.5 The *Mohel* should be careful not to remove either too much or too little foreskin. The aim is to completely uncover the glans, but not to remove excess skin from the shaft of the penis

- 4.3.6 Any remaining inner mucous membrane should be divided and reflected below the glans penis
- 4.3.7 Where the circumcision is being performed according to Jewish custom and tradition the *Mohel* should then aspirate blood (*metzitzah*)
- 4.3.8 The *Mohel* should cover surgical incisions with an appropriate dressing at the end of the procedure
- 4.3.9 The *Mohel* must place a pressure dressing over the wound at the end of the procedure
- 4.3.10 The *Mohel* must dispose of all instruments including sharps in an appropriate fashion to minimise risks of injury

4.4 After the procedure

- 4.4.1 The *Mohel* must check the baby for haemorrhage within thirty minutes of the *Brit Milah*
- 4.4.2 The *Mohel* must not leave until he has personally checked the baby and is absolutely satisfied that bleeding has stopped
- 4.4.3 The *Mohel* must give clear verbal and written instructions to the parents on how to care for the baby after the *Brit Milah*
- 4.4.4 The *Mohel* must give clear verbal and written instruction to the parents about what to do if they become concerned; and this should include clear written instructions on how to contact the *Mohel* if necessary
- 4.4.5 The *Mohel* must not leave until he is satisfied that the parents have received adequate verbal and written instructions, that they have understood them and have no further concerns or questions
- 4.4.6 The *Mohel* must contact the parents within 6 hours of the procedure to enquire whether there have been any changes noted in the baby's behaviour, and specifically enquire whether there has been any bleeding and whether the baby has passed urine
- 4.4.7 The pressure dressing must be removed within 24 hours. Any subsequent pressure dressings must also be removed within 24 hours by the *Mohel* or a paramedically qualified person
- 4.4.8 The *Mohel* or suitably qualified nominated deputy must be available to deal with any complications which may arise and must be aware of how and when to escalate problems which he is not competent to deal with. In particular, in the first two days after the *Brit Milah*, the *Mohel* or his deputy, must be available to respond at short notice if an urgent or emergency situation arises. If, in an emergency, it is not possible to reach the child in an appropriate time frame, he must refer the baby immediately to the nearest hospital and should consider advising the parents to use the local emergency services to transport the baby there

5. Governance

- 5.1 The *Mohel* must keep contemporaneous notes relating to all encounters with the baby or his family
- 5.2 It is the *Mohel's* responsibility to ensure that he remains up to date with developments in *Brit Milah* and the wider medical, social and *Halakhic* issues. He will usually achieve this by attending the in-service training provided by the Society and he should demonstrate regular attendance at these training events
- 5.3 Every *Mohel* will undergo an appraisal at least twice in every five years with a formal revalidation every five years. The revalidation process will inspect four areas in a similar way to the revalidation process for doctors. The four domains that will be inspected are:
 1. Knowledge, skills and performance
 2. Safety and quality
 3. Communication, partnership and teamwork
 4. Maintaining trust.In addition, the *Mohel* will be inspected in the area of Jewish law (*Halakhah*)
- 5.4 The Society should have a formal complaints handling procedure which is made easily available to the public.