

Autopsy Exercise 2006-7: Goals and Objectives

Purposes of the Autopsy

Autopsies have very important purposes in the medical setting. The mission of a hospital autopsy service is to help family and doctors understand the causes of a patient's demise, to document response to treatment, to determine if there are genetic components to diseases that may be relevant to surviving family members, and to support education of medical professionals. In the forensic setting, autopsies also have important medicolegal purposes, such as determining the “cause” and “manner” of death (eg natural, homicide, suicide, accident, etc). Information derived from autopsy frequently helps doctors take care of future patients. Often autopsy helps families gain a sense of "closure" and understanding, which may facilitate the grieving process.

For more general information about autopsies, please see the attached file, “Aiding the Living by Understanding Death”.

We believe it is important for all medical students to have the opportunity to observe an autopsy during their medical school careers. Specific goals and objectives of this exercise are listed below.

Goals and Objectives of the Autopsy Exercise

At the completion of this experience, the student should be able to:

- Understand the clinical reasons for performing an autopsy.
- Understand the indications for notifying the medical examiner after a death.
- Know who is legally authorized to give consent for autopsy.
- Effectively review a patient’s complete medical record.
- Correlate the clinical history and laboratory results with the gross autopsy findings in a given patient.
- Determine the cause of death based on gross autopsy findings, in the appropriate pathophysiologic sequence, and complete a death certificate worksheet.
- Reflect on what was learned from the autopsy and what questions remained unanswered in a brief written report.