

## **Autopsy Guidelines for Physicians**

*Although many of the specific details involved in an autopsy will vary from institution to institution, these are some generic guidelines designed to help providers work with families to ensure that the postmortem tissue donation process can occur. Please note that the concept of research oriented autopsy possibly performed on an urgent basis should be discussed with pathologists well before any individual cases arrive.*

1. **Attending Physicians:** The following steps must happen for any potential case. Actions do not necessarily have to be completed by a physician, but someone on the medical care team must ensure that none of these steps are skipped.
  - a. Discussion of and consent for **research protocol** with the patient and/or family
    - i. Some research protocols must be filled out by the patient prior to death while others can only be filled out by the next of kin post mortem. You must read the specific research protocol that you are interested in carefully to make sure that you are adhering to these legal guidelines.
  - b. Notify the pathologist and administrator on duty (AOD) of potential autopsy
    - i. It would be ideal to have an on-call autopsy pathologist to assist with tissue donation after hours and on weekends. If this is not possible, all involved parties should be notified of the available autopsy hours to avoid confusion.
    - ii. The role of the AOD will vary from institution to institution and state to state, but it is important that this group is notified. This is especially important in research protocols that call for rapid autopsy (6 to 8 hours post mortem) as the AOD can help expedite the autopsy consent and transportation processes.

- c. Discussion of and consent for **autopsy**
  - i. It is important to distinguish this from the research consent because, depending on the state laws, the autopsy consent may or may not be able to be done prior to death. Additionally, some states require that a hospital administrator (not the attending MD) fills out this form.
  - ii. It must be made clear to the family that the research consent is not the same as the autopsy consent and, in order to participate in the research study of choice, both documents must be discussed and filled out.

## 2. **Pathologists:**

- a. General Considerations:
  - i. Hours which can be covered for research autopsies
  - ii. Funding for transport and assistance
  - iii. Ability to perform limited autopsies based on the family's wishes
- b. Prior to autopsy:
  - i. Arrangements for transport
    - 1. This includes transport within the hospital (including some pre arrangement for payment of costs)
  - ii. Arrangements for release of patient/funeral home
- c. Post autopsy:
  - i. Communication of results of autopsy and tissue collection to clinicians