

**Important Phone Numbers:**

Decedent Affairs/  
Hospital Mortuary: \_\_\_\_\_  
Medical  
Examiner/Coroner: \_\_\_\_\_  
Pathology  
Department: \_\_\_\_\_

## Requesting Consent for Autopsy

### Preparation

When possible, prepare your patient's family by offering the option of an autopsy as you discuss an imminent death. Offer an informative pamphlet describing the autopsy.

### Who May Give Consent?

- Does the death fall under the Medical Examiner/Coroner's (ME/C) Jurisdiction? Contact the ME/C to confirm.
- Will the ME/C release the body to the hospital's pathologists if no medicolegal autopsy is to be performed?
- If the ME/C releases the body without an examination, the family should be offered a hospital autopsy.
- Consent for autopsy for non-ME/C's cases is granted by next-of-kin. (Check your hospital policy for your definition of "next-of-kin," or the person responsible for the body.)

### Requesting Consent

If you have not offered the option of autopsy prior to your patient's death, do so when you notify the family of the death:

I am \_\_\_\_\_, the doctor caring for your \_\_\_\_\_. I am sorry to have to tell you that he/she has died. His/her other doctors and I think that the cause of death was \_\_\_\_\_. It is your privilege to have an autopsy performed on your \_\_\_\_\_, if you choose. This is a service that the hospital provides, free of charge, to help us answer any questions that you or the doctors might have about his/her disease or the care he/she received.

It is important to help us learn more about [this disease] for the sake of patients in the future. The autopsy need not delay your funeral preparations, and even a complete autopsy will not disfigure the body, should you want a viewing.

Would you like us to perform an autopsy? (Offer a problem directed/limited autopsy if this is more acceptable).

**Physician, Remember:**

- That most families will give consent, if asked!
- That the patient's account and the family are not charged for the autopsy.
- That the autopsy is a careful medical/surgical examination, not the type of dissection in which you participated as a medical student.
- To try to make signing the consent easy (have the paperwork ready; offer alternate methods of consent like fax or phone, when available).

### Signing Consent

- Is telephone consent legal at your hospital? Faxed consent or telegram?
- Help the family fill out the consent form completely, including the witness signature(s).
- Thank them and assure them that the autopsy will be useful to them, the hospital and to future patients.



## The Value of Autopsy

For Families, Patients, and Society:	For Physicians and Hospitals:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Answers questions</li><li>• Assists in resolving grief and guilt</li><li>• Helps in settling insurance claims and in assigning death benefits</li><li>• Helps identify familial disorders</li><li>• Helps to ensure that the quality of medical diagnostics and care is high</li><li>• Helps to identify environmental/occupational health risks</li><li>• Helps to identify trends in infectious diseases</li><li>• Improves the accuracy of vital statistics</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Answers questions</li><li>• Allows self-evaluation of treatment practices and efficacy of therapy</li><li>• Helps monitor quality of care</li><li>• Helps to evaluate new diagnostic and therapeutic methods</li><li>• Helps to provide medicolegal information</li></ul>