

To

All doctors at Haukeland University Hospital

Your ref.:

Our ref.:

Bergen, 26 February 2008

SURVEY ON AUTOPSY PRACTICES

Request for your assistance on a medical student's thesis

Dear colleague,

In the course of their studies, all medical students at the University of Bergen must complete a thesis, which mostly involves a desk study and collection of original data.

The undersigned medical student is working on a thesis on the importance of autopsies and the conditions for autopsy practices in Norwegian hospitals.
His supervisor is Professor Steinar Aase at the Department of Pathology.

The work on this thesis has included the formulation of a questionnaire, which we are now sending to all doctors at Haukeland University Hospital. You will find the questionnaire enclosed with this letter.

We kindly request you to help us in this work by responding to the enclosed questionnaire and returning it as soon as possible. If you are unable to respond to some of the questions, we still ask you to return the questionnaire to us with the responses that you have given.

We regard this study as an important part of the efforts to improve the services provided to the clinicians by the departments of pathology. As will be seen on the questionnaire, you will have the opportunity to provide important feedback on how you perceive the importance of autopsy activities and your impression of the associated practicalities. In addition, the questionnaire has a value in itself as the key element of this thesis for the student's medical studies.

We are grateful for your good will and your assistance.
Please return the questionnaire before 20 March by internal mail.

Yours sincerely,

Per Ove Hagestuen
Stud. med.
University of Bergen

Steinar Aase
Senior Consultant and Professor
Section of Pathology, The Gade Institute,
HUS

RETURN ADDRESS:

Stud. med. Per Ove Hagestuen, c/o Senior Consultant Steinar Aase, Department of Pathology, Haukeland University Hospital

Questionnaire to all clinicians at Haukeland University Hospital regarding a “survey of practical conditions for autopsies in Norwegian hospitals” in the context of a medical thesis at the University of Bergen.

Question 1

	Surgery	Internal medicine	Other
What is your medical discipline?			

If other, please specify: _____

Question 2

	Yes	No	Don't know
Do you believe that autopsy is a good means of quality assurance and quality control in your daily work?			

Question 3

	Higher	At the present level	Lower
Today, an autopsy is performed on approximately 10 per cent of all deceased persons. Should this rate be higher, lower or remain at the present level?			

Question 4

	Yes	No	Don't know
Do you believe that the benefits of maintaining the autopsy rate at the present level are commensurate with the resources devoted to this task?			

Question 5

	Yes	No	Don't know
Should a larger proportion of the total resources of the Department of Pathology be devoted to autopsies, at the expense of other activities in the department?			

Question 6

	Yes	No	Don't know
Do you believe that autopsies remain as important as before, in spite of technological advances in medicine?			

If no, please list a maximum of five technological innovations that in your opinion have rendered autopsies less important?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Question 7

	Almost never	< 2 times per year	2-10 times per year	10-20 times per year	> 20 times per year
How often do you participate in demonstrations of the autopsies performed on that day?					

Question 8

	Often	Some-times	Rarely	Never
How often do you find that an autopsy provides useful information on the cause of death, other illness or a general medical understanding?				

Question 9

	Yes	No	Don't know
In your hospital, are the demonstrations of the autopsies performed that day held at a specific time?			

Question 10

	Yes	No	Don't know
In your opinion, is this time a suitable one?			

Question 11

	Yes	No	Don't know
Do you have time to attend the demonstrations, or do they collide with other tasks (doctor's rounds, polyclinic, etc.)?			

Question 12

	Yes	No	Don't know
Are you being encouraged by your superiors/colleagues to attend the demonstrations?			

Question 13

	Yes	No	Don't know
Could interdisciplinary meetings or video conferences constitute an alternative to the demonstrations?			

Question 14

	Yes	No	Don't know
Do you believe that a short response time for autopsies (time elapsing before the autopsy report is completed and finally signed) helps increase the number of autopsies?			

Question 15

	Yes	No	Don't know
Do you believe that better communication between the clinicians and the pathologists could help increase the number of autopsies?			

Question 16

	Yes	No	Don't know
Do you believe that the hospital's financial situation has an impact on the number of autopsies being performed?			

Question 17

	Yes	No	Don't know
Should health personnel be trained in how to provide information on the importance of autopsies to patients and their next of kin?			

Question 18

	Yes	No	Don't know
Could the number of refusals be reduced if better information on the importance of autopsies for determination of the correct diagnosis (-ses) and mortality statistics were provided to the population?			

Question 19

	Yes	No
Has it occurred that the next of kin have refused to have an autopsy performed on one of your patients?		

	Religion (%)	Culture, emotions and a desire to "let the dead rest in peace" (%)	Uncertain of the benefits of an autopsy (%)	Other (%)
If yes, what was the reason, provided that the next of kin have stated a reason?				

To
The Senior Consultant, Head of Department or equiv.
in all Departments of Pathology
in Norwegian hospitals

Your ref.:

Our ref.:

Bergen, 20 December 2007

**REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE ON A STUDY OF THE CONDITIONS FOR
AUTOPSY ACTIVITIES IN NORWAY.
MEDICAL THESIS OF PER OVER HAGESTUEN**

During their medical studies at the University of Bergen all students must write a thesis, which includes desk studies and an original investigation of a topic.

The undersigned Per Ove Hagestuen is currently writing a thesis on autopsy activities. This involves a desk study on autopsies in the past and present, in Norway and abroad. In addition, it is desirable to attempt to identify in more detail the conditions under which autopsies are performed in Norway, by way of a questionnaire survey sent to the departments of pathology.

My supervisor for this thesis is Steinar Aase, and the thesis should be regarded as a regular and mandatory part of my medical studies.

In this context, we would be very grateful if you would complete the enclosed questionnaire yourself or delegate this task to another person in your department. We would highly appreciate it if the completed questionnaire can be returned to us before 1 February 2008.

Should you have any questions, please contact Steinar Aase. All departments will receive a copy of the thesis when completed.

**Department of Pathology, Haukeland University Hospital
and The Gade Institute, University of Bergen
20 December 2007.**

Yours sincerely,

Per Ove Hagestuen
Stud. med.

Steinar Aase
Senior Consultant, Professor

Questionnaire to all departments of pathology in Norway regarding identification of “practical conditions for autopsy activities in Norwegian hospitals”, in the context of a medical thesis at the University of Bergen

Question 1

	2003	2004	2005	2006
How many hospital autopsies does your department perform annually (including foetuses/children < 2 years)?				
What percentage of all deaths in your hospital do these represent (including foetuses/children < 2 years)?				

Question 2

	2003	2004	2005	2006
How many forensic autopsies does your department perform annually (including foetuses/children < 2 years)?				
What percentage of all deaths in your hospital do these represent (including foetuses/children < 2 years)?				

Question 3

	Yes	No	Don't know
Has the number of hospital autopsies declined after the introduction of the new “regulations concerning autopsies, etc.” on 1 April 2004?			

Question 4

	Yes	No	Don't know
Has the number of forensic autopsies declined since the introduction of the new “regulations concerning autopsies, etc.” on 1 April 2004?			

Question 5

	%
For what percentage of the deaths do the next of kin refuse permission for an autopsy to be performed?	

Question 6

	%
For what percentage of the deaths do the next of kin refuse permission for autopsy material to be used for teaching or research purposes?	

Question 7

	Yes	No	Don't know
Has the number of refusals increased since the introduction of the new regulations in 2004, requiring that the next of kin must be informed?			

Question 8

	%
How often does it occur that autopsies cannot be performed because the next of kin has not been informed of a planned autopsy?	

Question 9

	Yes	No	Don't know
Could the number of refusals be reduced by providing better general information to the public concerning the importance of autopsies for determination of the correct diagnosis (-ses) and mortality statistics?			

Question 10

	Yes	No	Don't know
Should health personnel be trained in how to provide information on the importance of autopsies to patients and their next of kin?			

Question 11

	Yes	No
In your department, are the senior consultants charged with autopsies in the sense that they perform the practical dissection of the deceased?		

	%
If yes, what proportion of the autopsies in your department are in practice performed by senior consultants?	

Question 12

	Yes	No
Does your department have a separate demonstration room where the autopsies of the day are demonstrated to the clinicians?		

	Yes	No
If no, do the demonstrations take place in the autopsy theatre?		

Question 13

	Yes	No
Is the demonstration room suitable for this purpose?		

Comment: _____

Question 14

	Doctors from the dept. of pathology (number)	Doctors from clinical departments (number)	Other health personnel (number)
How many usually attend a regular demonstration in your department (student demonstrations not included)?			

Question 15

	Yes	No
Do you think that your department performs autopsies on an appropriate number of the deceased?		

	%
If no, in your opinion, what percentage of the deceased ought to be made subject to an autopsy?	

If the number of autopsies is smaller than you think it ought to be, what are the main reasons for this?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Question 16

	Yes	Yes, almost always	No, a little too rarely	No, much too rarely
In your opinion, do the police/court/prosecuting authority request an expert autopsy sufficiently often in cases where this may be relevant in light of laws and regulations?				

If not, are there in your opinion any particular situations where autopsies ought to be requested more often?

If you mean that expert autopsies are requested too rarely, what do you believe are the reasons for this?

Question 17

	Yes	No
Does your department have one or more assistant doctors?		

	Yes	No
Do(es) the assistant doctor(s) have any problems in being assigned a sufficient number of autopsies to meet the requirement for approval as a specialist within their nominal period of study?		

Question 18

	Years
How old is the autopsy theatre?	

	Year
Built	
Major refurbishment undertaken	

Question 19

	Yes	No
Is the autopsy theatre fit for purpose (in terms of construction, hygiene, prevention of spread of infections, etc.)?		

Comment: _____

Question 20

	Yes	No
Does the autopsy theatre have a separate room for autopsies of infectious cases (AIDS, hepatitis, serious bacterial infections)?		

Question 21

	Yes	No
Does your department perform forensic autopsies?		

	Yes	No
If yes, are these undertaken on separate premises?		

Question 22

	Days
What is the average response time (time elapsing before the autopsy report is completed and finally signed) at your department?	

Question 23

	Total number of autopsies	Total number of autopsies involving an opening of the cranium and examination of the brain	%
What proportion of the autopsies performed in 2006 involved an opening of the cranium and examination of the brain?			

Question 24

	%
In what proportion of cranial dissections is the brain examined in fresh condition?	

Question 25

	%
In what proportion of cranial dissections is the brain fixated before being examined?	

Question 26

	Burnt/destroyed (%)	Buried in a collective grave (%)	Replaced in the dead body and buried along with it (%)
What happens to the main volume of organs from an autopsy after the autopsy is finished and the findings, if relevant, have been presented to the clinicians?			

Question 27

	Teaching of students	Training of assistant doctors	Feedback to clinicians	Required statistics	Other
If you believe that you perform too few autopsies, is this a hindrance to meeting other obligations?					