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Perception of pathology residents about autopsies: results of a mini survey

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In the last edition of the journal Autopsy and Case Reports (A&CR), we discussed the general viewpoint of pathology residents on the issue of declining number of autopsies.¹ We mentioned that there is a general element of detestation for the autopsies among Pathology residents. To confirm this speculation, we conducted a brief survey among Pathology residents. This was a basic survey comprising a simple questionnaire that had only six questions. The survey was conducted on basis of personal connection only.

A total of 47 pathology residents completed the survey. Among these 44 were in combined anatomic pathology – clinical pathology program while 3 were in anatomic pathology only program. Sixteen residents were in their post graduate year (PGY) 4, 11 were PGY 3, 13 were PGY 2 and 7 were PGY 1. For 45 of these 47 residents, autopsy rotation was incorporated with other anatomic pathology rotations while 2 residents had dedicated time on autopsy rotation. Residents with incorporated rotation schedule, had autopsy rotation experience ranging from 4 months to 21 months.

On a scale of 10, the mean score for “liking their autopsy rotation” was 2.8. The mean score for the question, “how much do you think autopsy rotation is beneficial for Pathology residents?” was 3.6. For the question, “which anatomical pathology rotation you like the least?”, 87% (41 of 47) residents answered “autopsy rotation”. Interestingly medical

examiner / forensic autopsy rotation experience was rated 8.3 on a scale of 10.

Owing to small sample size, we analyzed the data as a whole and did not stratify the survey responses with respect to year in training or time spent on autopsy rotation. These basic results, however, demonstrate that our speculations were indeed right. Relatively old literature in this regard has similar results.^{2,3} We already mentioned the implications of declining number of autopsies for anatomic pathology residents in the last issue of 2017⁴ and also discussed the possible reasons for the view point of pathology residents depicted by this mini survey in our last letter to the editor.¹ As for medical examiner / forensic autopsy rotation, the results were completely opposite. Most residents seem to have a positive review about forensic autopsies. This may be due to the diverse death circumstances, rather than the educational value of forensic autopsies, which is interesting for most people, not just the pathology residents. Forensic autopsies certainly do have educational value for the pathology residents, but in author’s experience it is less than the hospital autopsies.

The results of our mini survey are an invitation for a thorough, nationwide, full scale survey with a detailed questionnaire. We again emphasize that the educational institutions need to stress upon the importance of autopsy among the residents and students.

Keywords

Autopsy, Education, Pathology, Physicians, Internship and Residency

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