

Forensic Pathology Autopsy Observation

After obtaining school and instructor approval, the student will contact the forensic pathology autopsy facility on the desired observation day at **517-364-2323 at 6:45 am** to find out if acceptable/suitable cases are available for observation. Students should identify themselves as MSU medical students (COM or CHM) and try to speak directly to an assistant.

Arrive to the autopsy facility on the ground floor of Sparrow Hospital between **7:45-8:00 am**. At 8:00 am, staff and pathologists meet to review the day's cases. Expect to spend 2-4 hours observing autopsies. Students will observe at least one entire autopsy and may be able to observe additional procedures, if circumstances and time allow. After observation, the students will discuss findings with the pathologist, who will then explain how to translate findings into a meaningful cause and manner of death and how to complete a death certificate.

Additional Information on Forensic Autopsy

A forensic autopsy examination is a medical/surgical procedure performed on a deceased person by a specially trained pathologist to determine cause of death, extent of disease, manner of death, and sometimes to collect evidence to be used in court.

- **Cause of death-** The injury or disease that brings about a physiological disturbance in the body that results in the individual's death. Examples include a gunshot wound of the head, pneumonia, ruptured aortic aneurysm, acute myocardial infarction (heart attack), or blunt force injuries.
- **Manner of death-** how the death came about *based on the circumstances* surrounding a particular cause of death, determined by a certifier based on tradition, guidelines, and available information. This became part of the US Standard Certificate of Death in 1910, and its purpose is to help public health officials and statisticians.

Classification of Manner of Death

- Natural- due to a disease or the aging process. Mental illness and chronic substance use are often considered diseases.
 - Homicide- due to the "volitional act committed by another person to cause fear, harm, or death". This term neither implies nor indicates *criminal* intent.
 - Suicide- due to "an injury or poisoning as a result of an intentional, self-inflicted act committed to do self-harm or cause the death of one's self."
 - Accident- due to an injury or poisoning where there is little or no evidence that the event occurred with intent to harm; the fatal outcome was unintentional.
 - Undetermined/Indeterminate- two or more competing manners of death are just as likely.
- **Significant conditions contributing to death-** if an *injury* such as a recent hip fracture or drug over dose is listed, the manner of death is NOT natural and the certifier must be the coroner or medical examiner.