

## A10 Forensic examinations

- A10.1 The practice of forensic pathology is considered to comprise both non-suspicious deaths where a post-mortem examination is requested by HM Coroner and suspicious deaths where a post-mortem examination under the auspices of HM Coroner is performed with a view to providing evidence for a criminal investigation. A department of forensic pathology should have easy access to departments of all other branches of pathology, a department of radiology and a forensic science laboratory. Where possible, all these departments should conform to the code of practice set out by the appropriate medical royal college or other supervising body.
- A10.2 Any post-mortem examination carried out by the forensic pathologist should be conducted in accordance with guidelines issued by The Royal College of Pathologists and the Home Office Policy Advisory Board for Forensic Pathology, except where deviations from those guidelines can be justified. It is considered best practice that evisceration of bodies for forensic post-mortem examination is carried out by the pathologist; evisceration may be delegated to the mortuary technician only in 'non-suspicious' deaths where the pathologist is satisfied by personal inspection of the body that that delegation is safe and appropriate and that evisceration is performed in the presence, and under the personal supervision, of that pathologist.
- A10.3 The pathologist must ensure that any decision to retain human material at post-mortem examination has been discussed with and ratified by the Coroner; it is the responsibility of the Coroner to make the retention of human material known to the next of kin of the deceased, to determine their wishes about disposal and to make those wishes known to the pathologist; the pathologist must be prepared to justify a decision to retain human material and to explain that decision to the next of kin. The pathologist must have a system of recording what human material has been retained, the authorisation for that retention and the date and method of disposal.
- A10.4 It may be that the forensic pathologist will have to perform post-mortem examinations within a mortuary with the 'providers' of which – be they NHS Trust or local authority – he or she has no formal contract of employment. It is not unreasonable, however, for the forensic pathologist to be satisfied that those mortuaries in which he or she may work are equipped to, and have working practices fully observant of, standards set out in the HSAC's *Safe working* document and, if not so satisfied, to make concerns known to the Coroner that such a mortuary is not a suitable place for the practice of post-mortem pathology.
- A10.5 The forensic pathologist may bear the responsibility for the safety of other personnel present at a post-mortem examination and, therefore, should conform to the health and safety procedures extant in the mortuary where that examination proceeds: where no such policy is in existence, the forensic pathologist should insist upon demonstration of the adequacy of the facilities for safe post-mortem examination and, if not assured of their presence, should refuse to conduct the examination at that mortuary.
- A10.6 Easy access to relevant literature – be it printed or electronic – is no less essential to the forensic pathologist than it is to any other branch of pathology: the head of a department of forensic pathology should ensure that that access is provided and that, where appropriate, that literature is consulted to substantiate opinions expressed.
- A10.7 It is accepted that the forensic pathologist may act as 'agent' for HM Coroner and may be under 'contract' with a police force, but the forensic pathologist must not act in any way that is not in accordance with the GMC's *Good Medical Practice* nor in any way which may be regarded as a failure to acknowledge that the pathologist's primary duty is to the court, rather than to any party to court proceedings. It is expected that a department shall have in

place a mechanism by which difficulties encountered in their relationships with mortuaries, Coroners and police forces with whom they may work can be addressed and resolved.

- A10.8 The responsibilities of the forensic pathologist in regard to clinical governance, quality assurance and research are no different in kind from those of the histopathologist. The forensic pathologist may be better placed to provide training in post-mortem practice to all those persons who may be concerned with such practice, be they pathologists in training, mortuary assistants or scene-of-crime officers, and a department must be willing to provide such training. Where the forensic pathologist provides such training for trainee pathologists and mortuary technicians, there should be a formal 'record of training' documenting what training has been given and when a satisfactory level of proficiency has been attained.