



The Royal College of Pathologists

## **Sudden Cardiac Death: A proposal to establish a national network of pathologists**

In early 2005 the Department of Health (DH) published its National Service Framework (NSF) on arrhythmia and sudden cardiac death in those under-35 years of age (Chapter 8 of the NSF on Coronary Heart Disease).

The chapter includes two documents from the College's Autopsy Guidance series, Information for Coroners (and Pathologists) and Scenario 1 on Sudden Death with Likely Cardiac Pathology. All can be accessed on the DH website:

[www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAndSocialCareTopics/CoronaryHeartDisease/fs/en](http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAndSocialCareTopics/CoronaryHeartDisease/fs/en)

One of the major challenges posed by the NSF report is to ensure that expert assessment of hearts from Coroner's autopsies on young sudden death victims is done by a pathologist with the necessary expertise, in order to identify inheritable and potentially treatable cardiac disorders.

Currently, this expert referral service is provided by a small number of pathologists with an interest in cardiac pathology. The service needs expansion.

There is also the additional challenge of ensuring that appropriate consent is obtained for long-term retention of histological material from referred coronial hearts.

Recently a small group of pathologists with an interest in cardiac pathology met with Dr Perry Elliott, a cardiologist with an interest in inherited cardiac disease who has been advising the DH on the implementation of the NSF's recommendations. They drafted a number of proposals, one of which was for the expansion of cardiac pathology services on a regional basis, with dedicated programmed activities. A national coordinator for the programme is proposed to develop a national database and to facilitate collaborative research in sudden cardiac death. The DH supports this initiative but funding has not yet been agreed.

The College wishes to support and facilitate the formation of the Sudden Cardiac Death Network, which will operate independently of the RCPATH.

We are therefore issuing this call for expressions of interest from pathologists who would like to join this network and develop their interest in the investigation of sudden cardiac death.

Members of the network will ideally have a significant Coroner's autopsy workload. Willingness to develop an interest in cardiovascular pathology is an obvious requirement but specific expertise in that area is not essential. We hope to attract pathologists from a variety of backgrounds, including District General Hospitals and those in forensic practice. Pathologists in the early phase of their consultant career are especially encouraged to join the network. Although the NSF for cardiac disease was developed in England the plan is to recruit pathologists from all areas of the British Isles. PA funding will be sought but this cannot be offered at present. Grant support will be sought to cover laboratory and travelling expenses.

The Association for European Cardiovascular Pathology is developing protocols for the proper investigation of sudden cardiac death. Members of the network will be welcome to contribute to this project and to interact with European colleagues.

If you are interested in joining the network could you please contact Dr Margaret Burke, College Speciality Advisor on Cardiovascular Pathology, email [M.Burke@rbht.nhs.uk](mailto:M.Burke@rbht.nhs.uk)

It is hoped that an initial meeting of interested pathologists will be held in the College in Autumn 2006.

**Peter Furness, Vice President, RCPATH**

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