



Autopsy - The final surgical operation

Event title	Autopsy – the final surgical operation. We used the surgical reference because the event was held at the Royal College of Surgeons (RCS).
Venue	McCrae Gallery in Hunterian Museum at the RCS.
Target audience	General public.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand and value the links between autopsies and medicine, e.g. how autopsies can impact positively on living patients, and help greatly with medical education.• Understand how the cause of death given before autopsy is wrong in a significant number of cases, despite clinicians being confident of their diagnosis.• Raise awareness of pathology's crucial role in treating and curing disease e.g. autopsies play a major role in understanding newly diagnosed diseases and are also responsible for the discovery of previously unknown diseases.• Understand how valuable autopsies can be in helping relatives with grief.
Age range	At our event the age ranged from under 10 to over 80, with most being 24-44. It was quite a challenge providing information in a way that everyone could understand. You might want to consider limiting the age range and adapting the event accordingly e.g. age 8-14, 14-18, over 18s.
How was the event advertised?	National Pathology Week (NPW) website, through RCS mailshots, posters in Hunterian Museum. We were contacted by several schools and by a lecturer in forensic science – it might be worth targeting similar groups locally.
Number attending	30 - 40
Booking required?	Yes, tickets had to be booked in advance (free of charge).
Length of event	2 hours.
Refreshments provided?	No.
Equipment needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promotional materials supplied by College.• Examination couch.• White sheets.• Water soluble marker pens.• Autopsy instruments (ladle, rib shears, T chisel, mallet, superglue, specimen cassette, forceps, bowel scissors, sponge, cake slice).• Pots or laminated photographs to demonstrate major organs.
People needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Model to play dead body.• Minimum one pathologist to demonstrate autopsy, ideally two.• Someone on registration desk.• Someone to welcome people to event, distribute and collect evaluation forms.

Printed material used	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poster to advertise event • Pre-event evaluation form • Autopsy instrument worksheet • Number labels for autopsy instruments • Post event evaluation forms • Consent forms for photographs taken during event
Room set up	<p>Rectangular room. Examination couch on one long wall with chairs arranged in semi-circles facing couch. Instruments spread out on tables on three sides of room.</p>
Event programme	<p>There are three parts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome and instrument quiz, Request to complete pre-event evaluation forms with NPW pencil provided on each seat. Description of event: 15 minutes to handle autopsy instruments and write down what they're used for on worksheet. 2. One-hour virtual autopsy, describing the process, demonstrating instruments at appropriate time, marking major organs and Y incision with marker pens. Use pots or photos to demonstrate what each organ looks like, possible showing one normal and one with common pathology. Model stood up at the end so that the organs could be demonstrated more clearly. Review of instruments and their uses. 3. Question and answer session with pathologists. Request to complete post-event evaluation form. Completed evaluation forms exchanged for a bag containing leaflet, highlighter pen, lanyard and badge on way out.
Possible variations	<p>Involve mortuary technicians, providing an opportunity to highlight their role in the autopsy.</p>
What did the audience particularly like?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being involved – hands-on part with the instruments, being encouraged to ask questions during the autopsy. • Demonstration – for this reason I think it works better with a fairly small audience.
What surprised the audience?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The size and location of some of the organs. • The respect and dignity with which an autopsy is performed. • How quickly an autopsy can be done.
What else would the audience have liked?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A chance to see a real autopsy or photographs of one. • More time for questions (we didn't include a Q&A session but would in future). • Several people requested a handout.
How much preparation was involved?	<p>Once the idea for the event was formed, there wasn't much preparation required. The autopsy instruments had to be photographed, the worksheet designed and evaluation forms printed. Most preparation was last minute – finding an examination couch and sheets and buying marker pens. The two pathologists running the event didn't meet until half an hour before it started.</p>
Any other comments?	<p>As the event was so oversubscribed, we emailed everyone one week and again one day before the event to remind them to let us know if they could not attend as there was a long waiting list for places.</p>