Autopsy
MHD 2018-19

• Autopsy = post-mortem examination
  – Medical vs Forensic Autopsy

Medical Autopsy

• Performed in hospitals
• Consent must be obtained from next of kin
  – Prioritized list of relationships on consent form
• External exam, internal examination of organs, histologic study of organ sections
• Clinico-pathologic correlation
Forensic Autopsy

- Performed in Medical Examiner’s office, forensic pathologist
- "Medical Examiner Cases"
  - Violent deaths:
    - Suicide, accident, criminal violence
  - Deaths less than 24 hours of hospital admission
  - Deaths of "healthy" individuals, unexpected deaths
  - Deaths during diagnostic/therapeutic procedures
  - Deaths within 24 hours of anesthesia
  - All deaths due to burns
  - Deaths where addiction to drugs/alcohol may have contributed to death
  - Dead on arrival to emergency department

In the latter half of the 20th century, medical autopsy rate in the US declined
Why?

Clinicians

- Request less
  - More confidence in modern diagnostic techniques
  - Discomfort with making request of grieving family
  - Culture of medicine which does not dwell on “failures”
  - Fear of results increasing malpractice cases
  - More patients with chronic disease dying outside hospital
Family

- Not informed of value
- Fear of being charged for autopsy
  - Most hospitals do not charge
- Delays in funeral arrangements
  - Generally not significant
- Worry about disfigurement of deceased
  - Autopsy does NOT distort body
  - Does not affect viewing

Pathologists

- Face increased demands on their time
  - More surgical specimens from surgeries and endoscopies dominate pathologists’ time
  - As new lab tests developed, the role of clinical pathology growing
  - Greater focus on research
  - Losing autopsy skills

Benefits of Autopsies in 2018
Physicians
- Establish final diagnoses, diagnose unsuspected disease
- Evaluate accuracy of pre-mortem diagnoses, results of treatment
- When possible, determine cause of death
- Opportunity for clinicians to correlate lab, physical findings with pathologic changes of disease
- Quality assurance, quality improvement

Families
- Identification of congenital or infectious disease
- Help eliminate belief that they contributed to death
- Provide comfort by providing cause of death
- Provides accurate data for benefits, worker's comp
- Some families are consoled by thought of contributing to medical advancement

Public
- Health surveillance:
  - Alert officials about contagious disease
  - Detection of environmental hazards
  - Contribution of vital statistics
- 87 new diseases were identified or clarified through post-mortem examinations from 1950-1988
  - Can also demonstrate changing patterns of disease, toxic and beneficial effects of new therapies, accuracy of imaging techniques
You (medical education)

• Source of organs with disease processes
  – Gross images, histopathology
• Reinforce concepts in anatomy, histology, and pathology
• Opportunity to integrate clinical knowledge with pathologic findings
• Provides tissue for research

Today’s Autopsy Video

• “Observe” 1 autopsy
  – What to focus on:
    • General process and components of autopsy
    • Importance of clinicopathologic correlation

You will not be expected to remember the medical and pathologic details of this case for the MHD exam