



GEORGIA BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

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SELECTED GUIDELINES FOR AUTOPSY PERFORMANCE AND SPECIAL AUTOPSY PROCEDURES

I. General Guidelines

- A. Autopsy examinations carried out by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) State Medical Examiner's Office will be done in accordance with the Georgia Death Investigation Act, O.C.G.A. 45-16. The cases that are mandated to be reported under this Act will be evaluated by the Medical Examiner personnel when reported by a coroner's office or law enforcement official, and the decision to perform an autopsy or other examination will be made based upon the circumstances of the case.
- B. If it is not already inherently clear that an autopsy needs to be performed, the final decision to perform an autopsy will rest with the pathologist who is consulted about the case.

II. Retention of Specimens

- A. Specimens of blood and other bodily fluids will be routinely retained during the course of a postmortem examination carried out by the GBI Medical Examiner's Office. However, analysis of these specimens will not be automatically ordered in every case. Instead, the pathologist will assess the necessity of performing toxicologic studies to determine the cause and manner of death of each individual case, and may indicate that the specimens be held within the Toxicology Section for a period of no less than two years, should such analyses be needed at a future time.
- B. If a request is received from a coroner, district attorney, or law enforcement officer for toxicologic studies to be performed in a case in which the specimens have been held, such requests will be referred to the supervisor of the Division of Forensic Sciences Toxicology Section, for analysis and disposition.

III. Motor Vehicle Accident Deaths

- A. The general guidelines concerning motor vehicle accident deaths will remain the same as those that were developed in 1997 between the GBI Medical Examiner, the Georgia State Patrol, and the Georgia coroners.

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B. Typically, autopsy examinations will only be performed on victims of motor vehicle accidents if:

- 1) felony criminal charges (i.e., vehicular homicide) are pending against a surviving driver;
- 2) if the decedent has no externally visible cause of death;
- 3) if the decedent has sustained other injuries (i.e., gunshot wounds); or
- 4) if the decedent is not identified or readily identifiable.

C. Thus, typically, victims of single-occupant motor vehicle accidents will not be examined unless other circumstances arise.

IV. Extensive Dissection Cases

- A. The circumstances which surround certain cases, most specifically the suspicious deaths of children and deaths of individuals either in police custody or while incarcerated in local or state penal facilities, routinely necessitate more extensive dissection during the course of an autopsy in order to find any deep soft tissue injuries that are impossible to discern externally.
- B. These procedures may include extensive soft tissue dissection of the neck, back, and extremities; the removal of the spinal column and spinal cord; and the removal of the eyes. All of these dissection procedures are commonplace and accepted in standard forensic pathology practice.
- C. The decision to perform extensive dissection procedures will rest with the pathologist who is performing the autopsy, based upon his or her evaluation of the circumstances surrounding the death and the other autopsy findings.