

March 1999 (Volume 40, Number 1)

Autopsy Findings and Clinical Diagnoses: Retrospective Study of 3,117

Autopsies

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Aim. To determine the extent of agreement between clinical and autopsy findings.

Methods. A 14-year retrospective study (1982-1995) of autopsies from the Departments of Internal Medicine and Surgery was performed at the Zagreb University Hospital Center, Croatia. The autopsy findings were compared with the clinical diagnoses.

Results. The autopsy rate among hospital deaths ranged between 23% and 33%. The overall rate of major discrepancies was 11.6% for all autopsy reports. The most common cause of death were cardiovascular diseases (40.9%), followed by malignancies (25.2%) and infections (12.9%). Among all cardiovascular diseases, myocardial infarction was the most frequently diagnosed (17.9%) and was misdiagnosed by clinicians in 16.5% of the cases. Incorrectly diagnosed malignancies were found in only 5.7% of the cases; hematological and lymphoid malignancies (48.8%) were the most common neoplasms and were usually confirmed before death. Infections were found in 46.9% of all autopsies. Bacterial pneumonias and peritonitis were overlooked in 67.5% and 23.5% of the cases, respectively, in which they existed together with another serious condition.

Conclusion. Modern technology has not improved the overall accuracy of clinical diagnoses. When an autopsy should be performed is still a matter of discussion.

Key words: autopsy; cause of death; clinical pathology; death certificates; mortuary practice; pathology department, hospital; protocols, clinical