



An Overview of Autopsy Techniques

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Forensic autopsies are postmortem examinations conducted by forensic pathologists to aid in the determination of mechanism, manner, and cause of death. No two of these examinations look alike with a wide range of evisceration techniques that can be utilized from start to finish. Each of these techniques have advantages to them, which make them more appropriate for certain examinations over others.

One of the more commonly used evisceration techniques is the Virchow method. This method involves the removal of organs one by one and has a couple of advantages to it. The forensic pathologist is able to evaluate the organs in more detail without excess tissue masking any surfaces. Additionally, removing the organs individually can speed up the process of dissection, allowing the pathologist to begin sectioning through the already removed organs while the remainder are eviscerated.

Another commonly used techniques is the Letulle method, also known as “en masse”. In this method, the entire organ block is removed as one. This allows for the best preservation of anatomy

amongst the organs and organ system. This preservation of anatomic relationships allows for a better overall picture for the forensic pathologist. A modified version of this technique is often used in academic settings where a pathology resident works in conjunction with a diener to perform the dissection and evisceration, respectively. For this modified Letulle technique “the heart is removed and given to the resident to begin dissecting, while the diener removes the bowel from the region just distal to the ligament of Treitz to the distal sigmoid-proximal rectum” (Waters 2009). The remaining organs are removed in one block. Using this modified technique can help expedite the process of dissection.

The Ghon method, or “en bloc”, can also be used to preserve anatomic relationships. In this technique organs are removed in three individual blocks, the thoracic, abdominal, and pelvic, as opposed to one large block. Breaking the large block down into these three sections makes the dissection much more manageable, while still maintaining anatomy between organs.

The final evisceration technique, which is very infrequently used, is the Rokitansky method. While this method isn't well defined, it seems to involve an in situ dissection, removing only what is needed instead of an entire evisceration. Doing so can prove useful in an infectious case, such as HIV or hepatitis C, where limited exposure is important.

There are many ways to approach a forensic autopsy, and each has good and bad to it. Determining what method to apply changes on a case by case basis. No matter the technique used, autopsies have proven to be an important tool in the world of forensic sciences.

Citation

1. Waters, B. L. (Ed.). (2009). *Handbook of autopsy practice* (Vol. 420). Totowa, NJ: Humana press.

