

## CANDIDATE HANDBOOK 2024



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## Autopsy Certificate

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It is essential to read this Handbook in conjunction with the ***Trainee Handbook – Administrative Requirements*** which has information about the College's structure and policies, together with details of requirements for registration, training and examination applications.

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## Section 1

### INTRODUCTION

The Autopsy Certificate provides evidence of competence in autopsy, i.e., the procedures used to determine the cause of death and investigate both the associated and “incidental” (unrelated to cause of death) effects of drugs, toxins and disease processes on bodily organs.

The Certificate may be obtained following experience and training as a post-Fellowship certificate or possibly during RCPA Fellowship training in Anatomical Pathology or General Pathology. Accrual of cases may commence during Fellowship training.

Three categories of Autopsy Certificate are offered, adult, perinatal and paediatric, in recognition of the possibility that individuals may wish to have certification for only one type of autopsy. Each category requires the documented completion of defined number of autopsies prior to being assessed by two examiners who are RCPA Fellows, one of whom must be external, i.e. must not have supervised or signed off any autopsies previously performed by the candidate.

At the discretion of the chief examiner, autopsies conducted during previous accredited training for Fellowships in Anatomical or General Pathology may be counted towards the Certificate. The applicant must provide documented evidence of satisfactory performance (DOPS forms) at the time of registration for the Autopsy Certificate.

### GENERAL AIMS OF THE CERTIFICATE

After having completed the requirements of the certificate, candidates should be competent to conduct autopsies independently and report autopsy pathology on either adult, perinatal or paediatric cases, depending on the category of certificate undertaken.

Specifically, they should be able to

- Establish, monitor and troubleshoot reliable methods for specimen identification and laboratory accession for autopsy specimens;
- On the basis of all the information for a specific case, develop and record a professional opinion as to the nature, causation, severity and likely sequelae of the pathological processes;
- Write autopsy reports with appropriate clinicopathological, toxicology and laboratory correlation;
- Conduct postmortem examinations in accordance with all relevant regulations and other requirements
- Understand and comply with health and safety issues surrounding the postmortem examination

### REQUIREMENTS

Applicants must have previous or concurrent documented accredited training experience in anatomical or general pathology during which they are expected to be competent to complete external, internal, histology, ancillary investigations as required and clinicopathological correlation.

Autopsies must be undertaken in departments which have been accredited by RCPA for training in autopsy.

The following conditions strictly apply:

- No shared autopsies with other candidates are permitted to be counted in the required numbers.
- A scientist, a lab technician or Fellow must be present during autopsies.

- A full report must be written for all autopsies (see Appendix 2);
- A broad range of autopsies must be undertaken which reflects best practice, as specified in each category;
- The candidate will be responsible for organising access to the autopsies;
- The final autopsy assessment will be conducted by two RCPA Fellows, one of whom must be **external**, i.e., must not have supervised or signed off any autopsies previously performed by the candidate.

The three categories of Autopsy Certificate are:

1. **Perinatal Autopsies:**

These should be conducted on fetuses and placentas above 15 weeks (documented) gestation, late stillborns and neonates (defined as babies surviving up to 28 days of age). The spectrum of cases should cover a wide cross section of causes of death with stillborn as well as liveborn cases included.

Twenty (20) such autopsies must be totally completed by the candidate before attempting the examination, with categories including:

- congenital abnormalities
- intrapartum death
- late intra-uterine fetal death (IUFD)
- infection
- primary placental pathology

Examination of the placenta: should be a routine component of the autopsy, including those following upon neonatal deaths if possible.

2. **Paediatric Autopsies:**

These should be conducted on children exceeding 28 days of age but not more than 16 years of age, with the exception of autopsies conducted on young adults dying as a consequence of pre-existing managed paediatric disease.

Ten (10) such must be totally completed by the candidate before attempting the examination, of which at least two should be full three cavity autopsies. The spectrum of cases should include a variety of causes of death such as

- Infections
- Syndromes
- Sequelae to events in the perinatal period, e.g., a 14-year-old dying with aspiration due to severe cerebral palsy secondary to intrapartum asphyxia

3. **Adult Autopsies:**

These should be conducted on persons greater than 16 years of age, for the investigation of a diagnosed medical condition or for assessment, management or treatment of known disease, and in exceptional circumstances, deaths which in some but not all jurisdictions come under the purview of the Coroner.

Ten (10) such must be totally completed by the candidate before attempting the examination, of which at least two should be full three cavity autopsies. The spectrum of cases should include:

- Two related to infection
- Two complex cases, e.g., ICU related deaths
- At least one should be examination after treatment(s) for malignancy
- Two with a neuropathological slant.
- No more than two cases should be unnatural deaths (e.g., suicide, accidental traumatic deaths). Although Coronial autopsies may be utilised as part of these 10 required cases, it is expected that if coronial autopsy cases are included, they will encompass a wide range of disease and conditions (including deaths following medical treatment, infectious

disease and those with neuropathological issues). Cases of ischaemic heart disease should form no more than two cases.

- Some overlap of categories is acceptable (e.g., infection post chemotherapy).

## SUPERVISION

All autopsies must be supervised, normally be a Fellow of the RCPA; however non-Fellows may be approved by the Chief Examiner if no Fellow is available. They are expected to observe, discuss and give feedback on the candidate's autopsy competence.

## ASSESSMENT

Assessment is by formal examination and by submission of documented evidence that the candidate has completed the required number of autopsies under the conditions prescribed for the appropriate autopsy category. See Appendix 2 for detailed requirements.

### Examinations

Formal autopsy examination: this practical examination of autopsy competence is taken following completion of the required number of autopsies, i.e., 20 perinatal, 10 paediatric or 10 adult. See Appendix 1 for detailed requirements.

## RESOURCES

Texts, journals and weblinks are in the Autopsy Certificate section of the RCPA website.

Other peer-reviewed resources should be consulted as necessary for comprehensive coverage, especially contemporary reviews and key papers in the general anatomical pathology literature.

## APPLICATION PROCESS

Candidates who wish to pursue the Autopsy Certificate should email the College at [bea@rcpa.edu.au](mailto:bea@rcpa.edu.au) with an expression of interest, stating the intended autopsy category. On receipt by the College, an *Autopsy Certificate Interim Submission Form* will be sent to the applicant.

Upon completion of 70% of the DOPS, candidates should submit e-copies of the DOPS paperwork, together with the completed Autopsy Certificate Interim Submission form, to the College. The purpose of the interim submission is for the chief examiner to determine whether the case mix meets requirements. Candidates should wait for the Chief Examiner's determination before completing the remaining 30% of DOPS, as there may be recommendations for undertaking the additional DOPS.

On completion of all requirements, candidates should submit to the College the completed Autopsy Certificate Application form, copies of all DOPS paperwork and a copy of the Examination of Autopsy Competence forms. A fee is payable at the time of submission of this application.

## Section 2

# LEARNING OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDED ACTIVITIES

### OUTCOMES

Candidates should demonstrate competence in

- Ability to discuss relevant clinical or other information necessary to formulate a plan of approach the autopsy
- Awareness of relevant workplace health and safety considerations relevant to the performance of the autopsy
- Conducting an external examination and identifying abnormalities
- Conducting a macroscopic dissection and identification of abnormalities/antecedent pathology
- Undertaking and interpreting appropriate radiographic and other ancillary investigations
- Competently perform specialised dissections
- Selecting appropriate tissue blocks from the overall examination and from areas of special dissection
- Formulating a microscopic report
- Making a diagnosis or identifying cause of death
- Writing an autopsy case report that correlates clinical and pathological features and discusses diagnosis/cause of death relating to underlying aetiology

### ACTIVITIES

- Participate in the department's autopsy program
- Read government guidelines on ethical autopsy practice
- Access relevant parts of the Coroner's Act

## Section 3

### APPENDICES

Appendix 1	Assessment summary of requirements
Appendix 2	DOPS forms for perinatal, paediatric and adult autopsies
Appendix 3	Autopsy formal examination

## Appendix 1

### Assessment: summary of requirements

Assessment for the Autopsy Certificate consists of

- Documented evidence (DOPS forms) of completion of the required number and type of autopsies
- A formal examination

Examinations are prepared in accordance with RCPA Guideline 3/2015 Quality Framework for RCPA Examinations – Written, Practical and Oral.

#### Portfolio of autopsy cases

Depending on the category of Autopsy Certificate, candidates may undertake the autopsy examination, after having satisfactorily performed a **minimum** of

- ☐ 10 adult autopsies; OR
- ☐ 10 paediatric autopsies OR
- ☐ 20 perinatal autopsies.

Evidence of satisfactory performance must be recorded on a separate Autopsy DOPS form for each case (see Appendix 2). In totality, the autopsies must satisfy the conditions specified on pp 1-2.

#### Autopsy examination:

This is a practical examination in which two examiners observe and assess the candidate conducting an autopsy. They must be

- An RCPA Fellow who is experienced in autopsy, is external to the department, and who has not previously supervised or signed off on the candidate's autopsies, and
- An RCPA Fellow who is the Departmental Autopsy service supervisor;

Or

- RCPA Fellow (in Anatomical or General Pathology) other than the autopsy supervisor; and
- RCPA Fellow in Forensic Pathology



## Appendix 2


**DOPS forms** are on pp 9-11.


These are **master copies** of the forms to record each category of autopsy: perinatal, paediatric case or adult.


The autopsies must have been done totally by the candidate while observed by an appropriately qualified scientist, laboratory technician or RCPA Fellow. Please make as many copies of the DOPS forms as you need and file the completed forms in the portfolio folder.

**The forms and requirements for assessing autopsy competence** are on pp12-14.

Please read the **requirements** carefully. Each assessor will need a copy of the form for a single assessor. One consensus form will be needed, to be co-signed by each assessor.

 <b style="font-size: 2em; vertical-align: middle;">RCPA</b> The Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia		<b>Certificate in Autopsy: perinatal case</b> <b>Directly Observed Practical Skill</b>	
<b>How to use this form</b> This form is to be copied and used to record performance of each of the 20 perinatal autopsies that are required to have been totally completed by the candidate before attempting the examination.  Please use a different form for each case and use the tick box to indicate the type of case or examination conducted. Refer to the section on Requirements for conditions regarding maximum and minimum numbers of case types.  <b>By signing this form, the observer verifies that the candidate has achieved a satisfactory level of performance in terms of</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Autopsy technique and detailed dissection of organs</li> <li>A satisfactory full written report (gross, microscopy, final diagnosis)</li> <li>Clinicopathological correlation</li> <li>Ability to summarise relevant clinical information and laboratory data</li> <li>Verbal presentation of autopsy findings</li> <li>Knowledge of special stains</li> <li>Completion of report within period specified by departmental policy</li> </ul> <b>And that</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The candidate conducted the total autopsy and did not share it with another candidate</li> <li>A qualified observer (scientist, lab technician, Fellow) was present during the autopsy.</li> </ul>			
Candidate name		RCPA ID	<input type="checkbox"/> Fellow <input type="checkbox"/> Trainee
Date of autopsy	Lab ref number	Brief description of case and level of complexity	
Cause of death			
Gestational age			
Liveborn <span style="margin-left: 100px;"><input type="checkbox"/> yes</span> <span style="margin-left: 100px;"><input type="checkbox"/> no</span>			
Intrapartum death <span style="margin-left: 100px;"><input type="checkbox"/> yes</span> <span style="margin-left: 100px;"><input type="checkbox"/> no</span>			
Late intra-uterine fetal death <span style="margin-left: 20px;"><input type="checkbox"/> yes</span> <span style="margin-left: 20px;"><input type="checkbox"/> no</span> Number of weeks gestation (≥ 38 weeks)			
Congenital abnormality <span style="margin-left: 100px;"><input type="checkbox"/> yes</span> <span style="margin-left: 100px;"><input type="checkbox"/> no</span> Nature of abnormality			
Infection <span style="margin-left: 100px;"><input type="checkbox"/> yes</span> <span style="margin-left: 100px;"><input type="checkbox"/> no</span> Nature of infection			
Placental cause <span style="margin-left: 100px;"><input type="checkbox"/> yes</span> <span style="margin-left: 100px;"><input type="checkbox"/> no</span> Nature of cause			
Observer name and position		Signature	Date
Laboratory details			

 <b>RCPA</b> The Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia	<b>Certificate in Autopsy: paediatric case</b> <b>Directly Observed Practical Skill</b>	
<p><b>How to use this form</b>          This form is to be used to record performance of the 10 paediatric autopsies that are required to have been totally completed by the candidate before attempting the examination.</p> <p>Please use a different form for each case.</p> <p>Autopsies should be conducted on children exceeding 28 days of age but not more than 16 years of age, except for autopsies conducted on young adults dying as a consequence of pre-existing managed paediatric disease.</p> <p>The spectrum of cases should include a variety of causes of death. Please refer to the section on Requirements for conditions regarding maximum and minimum numbers of case types.</p>		
<p><b>By signing this Autopsy Summary Form, the observer verifies that the candidate has achieved a satisfactory level of performance in terms of</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Autopsy technique and detailed dissection of organs</li> <li>• Written report (gross, micro, final diagnosis)</li> <li>• Clinicopathological correlation</li> <li>• Ability to summarise relevant clinical information and laboratory data</li> <li>• Verbal presentation of autopsy findings</li> <li>• Knowledge of special stains</li> <li>• Completion of report within period specified by departmental policy</li> </ul> <p>And that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The candidate conducted the total autopsy and did not share it with another candidate</li> <li>• A qualified observer (scientist, lab technician, Fellow) was present during the autopsy.</li> </ul>		
<b>Candidate name</b>	<b>RCPA ID</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Fellow <input type="checkbox"/> Trainee
<b>Date of autopsy</b>	<b>Lab ref number</b>	
<b>Cause of death</b>		<b>Age of deceased</b>
<p><b>Brief description of case and level of complexity</b>  <i>Include information about infections, syndromes, etc. and sequelae to events in the perinatal period (e.g., a 14-year-old dying with aspiration due to severe cerebral palsy secondary to intrapartum asphyxia)</i></p>		
<p><b>Number of cavities assessed</b>     <input type="checkbox"/> One                      <input type="checkbox"/> Two                      <input type="checkbox"/> Three</p> <p><b>Please specify cavity type:</b></p>		
<b>Observer name and position</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Laboratory details</b>		

		<b>Certificate in Autopsy: adult case</b> <b>Directly Observed Practical Skill</b>	
<p><b>How to use this form</b>          This form is to be used to record performance of the 10 adult autopsies that are required to have been totally completed by the candidate before attempting the examination</p> <p>Please use a different form for each case and use the tick box to indicate the type of case or examination conducted.</p> <p>These should be conducted on persons more than 16 years of age, for the investigation of a diagnosed medical condition or for assessment, management or treatment of known disease, and in exceptional circumstances, deaths which in some but not all jurisdictions come under the purview of the Coroner.</p> <p>Please refer to the section on Requirements for conditions regarding maximum and minimum numbers of case types.</p> <p><b>By signing this Autopsy Summary Form, the observer verifies that the candidate has achieved a satisfactory level of performance in terms of</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Autopsy technique and detailed dissection of organs</li> <li>• Written report (gross, micro, final diagnosis)</li> <li>• Clinicopathological correlation</li> <li>• Ability to summarise relevant clinical information and laboratory data</li> <li>• Verbal presentation of autopsy findings</li> <li>• Knowledge of special stains</li> <li>• Completion of report within period specified by Departmental policy</li> </ul> <p>And that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The candidate conducted the total autopsy and did not share it with another candidate</li> <li>• A qualified observer (scientist, lab technician, Fellow) was present during the autopsy.</li> </ul>			
Candidate name		RCPA ID	<input type="checkbox"/> Fellow <input type="checkbox"/> Trainee
Date of autopsy		Lab ref number	
Cause of death			Age of deceased
<b>Infection</b> <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no    Nature of infection			
<b>Complex case</b> <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no    Nature of complexity			
<b>Malignancy</b> <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no    Nature of malignancy			
<b>Neuropathology</b> <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no    Nature of pathology			
<b>Coronial</b> <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no    Details			
<b>Number of cavities assessed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> One <input type="checkbox"/> Two <input type="checkbox"/> Three <b>Please specify cavity type:</b>			
Observer name and position		Signature	Date
Laboratory details			

## Examination of competence in autopsy

### Requirements

Two assessors from one of the following categories are required to observe the candidate conducting an autopsy:

- RCPA Fellow (in Anatomical or General Pathology) who is external to the department; and
- Departmental Autopsy service supervisor;
- or
- RCPA Fellow (in Anatomical or General Pathology) other than the autopsy supervisor; and
- RCPA Fellow in Forensic Pathology

Please print the forms for Examination of Autopsy Competence on the following pages. Print two copies of the form that records the judgment of a single assessor. A form should be completed by each assessor independently. They should record their consensus assessment on the Consensus form.

**Perinatal cases:** a minimum of 20 completed perinatal autopsies must have been documented prior to the examination

**Paediatric cases:** a minimum of 10 completed paediatric autopsies must have been documented prior to the examination

**Adult cases:** a minimum of 10 completed adult autopsies must have been documented prior to the examination. The autopsy performed for the Examination of Competence assessment must be of the **three-cavity type**.


For all autopsies, the report should include:


- Clinical history and investigations, including maternal history in a fetal or perinatal case
- External examination
- Macroscopic dissection
- Microscopy
- Ancillary investigations
- Diagnosis
- Clinico-pathological correlation including a discussion of the diagnosis/cause of death relating to underlying aetiology and recurrence risk

On completion of the assessment, please forward the following documents to the College:

- The two Examination of Autopsy Competence forms completed independently by the two examiners and the consensus form;
- The de-identified copy of the autopsy report.

Please email the forms to the College: [bea@rcpa.edu.au](mailto:bea@rcpa.edu.au)

		<b>Certificate in Autopsy</b> Examination of autopsy competence <b>Record of the decision of a single assessor</b>		
Candidate name		RCPA ID		
Assessor name		Assessor position		
Location of assessment (laboratory/service):				
Autopsy lab number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Adult (3 cavities) <input type="checkbox"/> Paediatric <input type="checkbox"/> Perinatal <i>(tick one)</i>			
Please rate the following aspects of the candidate's performance (S= satisfactory; NS = not satisfactory; n/a = not applicable)		S	NS	n/a
Ability to discuss relevant clinical or other information necessary to approach the autopsy in a meaningful way				
Demonstrated awareness of relevant workplace health and safety considerations relevant to the performance of the autopsy				
External examination and identification of abnormalities				
Macroscopic dissection and identification of abnormalities/antecedent pathology				
Appropriate ancillary investigations				
Specialised dissection of .....(specify specialised system examined)				
Selection of appropriate tissue blocks from the overall examination				
Selection of appropriate tissue blocks from the area of special dissection				
Microscopic report				
Diagnosis/cause of death identification				
Appropriateness and relevance of clinicopathological correlation				
Autopsy case report conforms to specified requirements				
<b>Please comment on any other relevant aspects, especially on aspects for improvement if the assessment was NOT satisfactory</b> (Please use the reverse if insufficient space)				
<b>Final outcome</b> (please tick) <input type="checkbox"/> Competent <input type="checkbox"/> Not yet competent		Date of assessment		
Assessor name (print) and signature  Position  Laboratory		Signature of candidate		

		<b>Certificate in Autopsy</b> Examination of autopsy competence <b>Record of the Consensus decision</b>				
Candidate name				RCPA ID		
Observer/Assessor name		Observer/Assessor position				
Location of assessment (laboratory/service):						
Autopsy lab number:		Type of case (tick one) <input type="checkbox"/> Adult <input type="checkbox"/> Paediatric <input type="checkbox"/> Perinatal				
<b>Please comment on whether these aspects of the candidate's performance are satisfactory for the stage of training</b> (S=satisfactory; NS=not satisfactory; n/a not applicable)				S	NS	n/a
Ability to discuss relevant clinical or other information necessary to approach the autopsy in a meaningful way						
Demonstrated awareness of relevant workplace health and safety considerations relevant to the performance of the autopsy						
External examination and identification of abnormalities						
Macroscopic dissection and identification of abnormalities/antecedent pathology						
Appropriate ancillary investigations						
Specialised dissection of ..... (please state specialised system examined)						
Selection of appropriate tissue blocks from the overall examination						
Selection of appropriate tissue blocks from the area of special dissection						
Microscopic report						
Diagnosis/cause of death identification						
Appropriateness and relevance of clinico-pathological correlation						
Autopsy case report conforms to requirements specified on page 1						
<b>Please comment on any other relevant aspects, especially on aspects for improvement if the assessment was NOT satisfactory</b> (Please use the reverse if insufficient space)						
<b>Final outcome</b> (please circle) <input type="checkbox"/> Competent <input type="checkbox"/> Not yet competent					Date of assessment	
<b>Assessor 1</b> Name (print) and signature  Position  Laboratory			<b>Assessor 2</b> Name (print) and signature  Position  Laboratory			
Signature of candidate						