

**A18**

**Are post-mortems in cancer patients useful?**

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**Background:** The use of post-mortem examinations (PMs) has recently faced public controversy. The number of PMs requested has declined. Scottish standards for PMs have been established and audited.<sup>1</sup>

**Aims:** To examine the value of PMs in patients with cancer and to review feedback of findings to family.

**Methods:** Review of pathology reports and clinical notes of all patients undergoing PMs as requested by a consultant cancer physician between 1998 and 2005.

**Results:** Reports of 54 of the total 56 PMs were reviewed. Cause of death was different to the presumed cause in 21 cases (39%). Important new diagnoses were made in 46 cases (85%). There were delays in issuing the results of PMs in 91% of cases. These failed to meet the 21 day target for reports. Many patients had lung cancer and despite a high index of suspicion, pulmonary emboli were identified only at PM in 6 patients. 16 of the 20 relatives asked (80%) gave specific permission for retention of tissues. All relatives were offered consultant feedback on the results and 7% took up this offer.

**Conclusions:** PMs continue to provide a high educational return, identifying new and more accurate diagnoses. There is a delay in obtaining reports, which may be of detriment to educational value and delays feedback to the bereaved relatives. Interestingly, diagnostic accuracy of PE in patients with cancer is low. PMs are being performed with the full consent of relatives.

1. Standards for the Management of Post-mortem Examinations. NHS Quality Improvement Scotland. 2005.