

Brain Autopsy: The gift of Knowledge



University of Michigan
Health System

Michigan Alzheimer's Disease Research Center

Why is an autopsy important?

It is the only way to confirm a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease with 100% accuracy.

Why is it a gift for future generations?

- **Benefits the family.** It gives family members vital medical information about the exact cause of their loved one's illness which is valuable for future generations.
- **Contributes to scientific research.** Information from the autopsy is very helpful to researchers working to better understand Alzheimer's disease. This information can help doctors better treat and possibly prevent Alzheimer's disease in the future.

How is the autopsy done?

The family must notify the MADRC's Brain Bank Coordinator quickly (within 2 hours) after death. A pathologist removes the brain through an incision in the back of the head. The incision should not be noticeable or interfere with a family's request for an open coffin. After the brain tissue is removed, special chemicals are applied to sections of the brain, which allows pathologists to learn more about the person's disease.

Does an autopsy delay funeral arrangements?

When arranged prior to the person's death, a brain autopsy should not delay the funeral arrangements.

Does it cost anything?

For patients participating in studies at the MADRC, the autopsy is free. MADRC will also pay the cost of transporting the patient's body from the place of death to the hospital and then to the funeral home.

Does the autopsy have to be arranged before the person dies?

Yes. Consent forms must be signed and given to the patient's doctor, hospital pathologist, funeral home and to the nursing home, if necessary. Most families appreciate having sufficient time to discuss this important decision.

Do I have to have a brain autopsy if I participate in other research studies at the MADRC?

No, the brain autopsy program is completely voluntary.

Does brain autopsy interfere with religious beliefs?

No, brain donation does not conflict with most religious beliefs. If you have questions concerning this issue, you may want to contact your own religious leader.

Will the family get a copy of the autopsy report?

Yes, the report is sent to the family within six to nine months of the autopsy. After receiving the report, family members should contact their local physician and he/she will be able to discuss the report results and implications.

If you have questions about the autopsy or would just like to discuss the issue with someone, please call (734) 936-8764. If you would like to make pre-arrangements for an autopsy, contact the MADRC Brain Bank Coordinator at (734) 764-5479.