

Conclusions

- 7.1 While some of these guidelines are self evident, and others are already common practice, it is acknowledged that full implementation requires continuing liaison between the public, pathologists, medico-legal authorities, and funeral directors. Because clinicians explain the need for post-mortem examination to relatives and obtain consent, it will be necessary for the Royal College of Pathologists to discuss some of the issues raised with other medical Royal Colleges and professional bodies, and to seek their co-operation. Medical staff requesting post-mortem examinations or dealing with relatives' enquiries must be apprised of the legal, ethical and emotional aspects, and also the medical indications for and importance of organ retention, so that they can obtain informed consent.
- 7.2 Advances in medicine and in pathological techniques, and changing public attitudes and legislation, render it impossible to anticipate every situation relating to organ retention. Therefore, these guidelines should be reviewed periodically and, if necessary, amended.

Summary of recommendations

- 8.1 Medical schools and hospitals should provide training for medical, and other appropriate personnel (e.g. trained bereavement counselling officers), in requesting and obtaining consent for post-mortem examinations and in dealing with relatives' concerns about tissue and organ retention. This should form part of the induction programme for house officers, senior house officers and specialist registrars in all disciplines.
- 8.2 Doctors, or other appropriate suitably trained personnel, seeking consent for a post-mortem examination should first liaise with the pathologist to determine the necessity of and grounds for retaining tissue so that relatives can make informed decisions regarding consent.
- 8.3 Hospital authorities should produce an information leaflet for relatives explaining the purpose of post-mortem examinations, the medical benefits of tissue and organ retention, and their rights to grant or refuse consent.
- 8.4 Hospital authorities should ensure that post-mortem examination consent forms inform relatives of the purpose of the examination and offer relatives a range of options for which they can separately grant or withhold consent. A model consent form is included in this document as Annex A.