

Oxford Minimally Invasive Autopsy Service

Information sheet for families

When a death is reported to a Coroner, a post mortem examination (also known as an autopsy) may be necessary in order to determine the cause of death and provide information to assist with the Coroner's inquiries. The traditional or "invasive" autopsy involves the body cavities being opened to enable the removal and careful examination of the major organs. In a full autopsy, the chest, abdomen and head are opened. The organs are subsequently returned to the body. You may find the thought of your loved one's body being opened up in this way distressing, or you may have an objection to invasive autopsy based on your religious beliefs.

Whilst the family cannot prevent a Coroner's autopsy taking place, if you do have an objection to traditional autopsy, it is possible to request a less-invasive post mortem examination. A "minimally invasive autopsy" (MIA) service is now offered in Oxford. Instead of the body being opened up, a CT scan (a form of x-ray examination) is performed. In some cases, a procedure known as angiography is also necessary. This is the injection of a type of fluid detected by x-rays that enables the demonstration of arterial disease causing a heart attack.

Commonly asked questions:

Can all autopsies be replaced by MIA? No, MIA is not always appropriate as some conditions cannot be detected by a scan. However, most cases of sudden unexpected deaths in adults can be investigated in this way. If you request a MIA, the Coroner's office will contact the pathologist in Oxford who will review the clinical history and decide whether or not MIA is appropriate.

Does MIA always identify the cause of death? No, MIA will identify a definite cause in approximately three-quarters of sudden adult deaths. In the other one quarter of cases, some form of invasive procedure will be required, although this is usually limited according to the imaging findings. It is very unusual for a full invasive autopsy to be required following MIA.

Will MIA delay the funeral? No. MIA takes place at the Churchill Hospital in Oxford, on the same day as invasive autopsy would normally be performed (either the same day or next day following instruction from the Coroner). If an invasive examination is required this will be performed immediately following MIA, in the mortuary at the John Radcliffe Hospital (a separate hospital one mile from the Churchill Hospital).

Is there a cost associated with MIA? Yes, the cost of the scanning procedures is £450. This will normally be paid by the family through their funeral director or burial society. The funeral director may also issue a fee for transferring the deceased for MIA in Oxford.

Please contact the Coroner's office if you have any further questions.