

# *Autopsy 101*

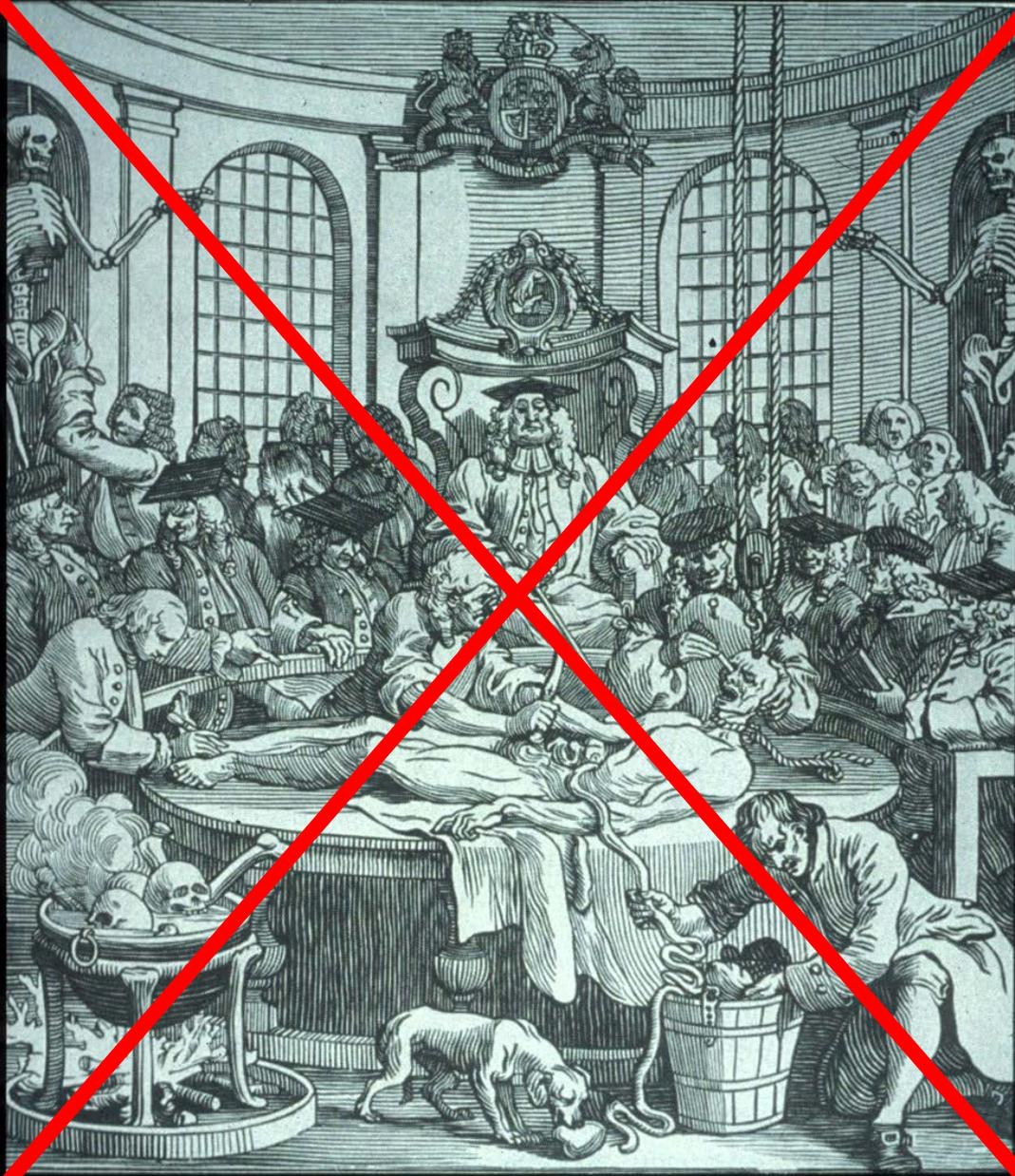
*A Guide for the Uninitiated  
& A Refresher  
for the Unfamiliar*

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*Director of Autopsy*

*Director, Legacy Gift Rapid Autopsy Program*

*Associate Professor of Pathology*



An autopsy  
is a diagnostic  
medical  
procedure done  
for a patient,  
not to a body.





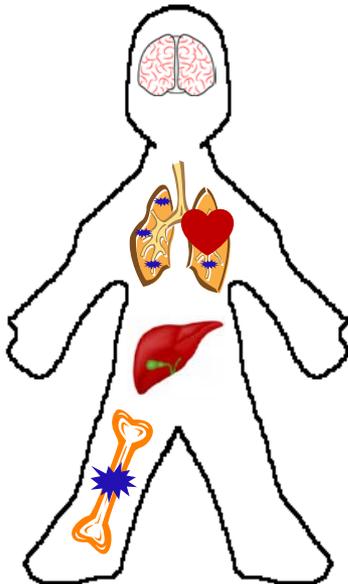
# Why do autopsies?

- Investigation of causes of death
- Quality assurance
- Observation of treatment effects
- Information & closure for families
- Education of trainees, physicians
- Public health
- Tissue banking/research

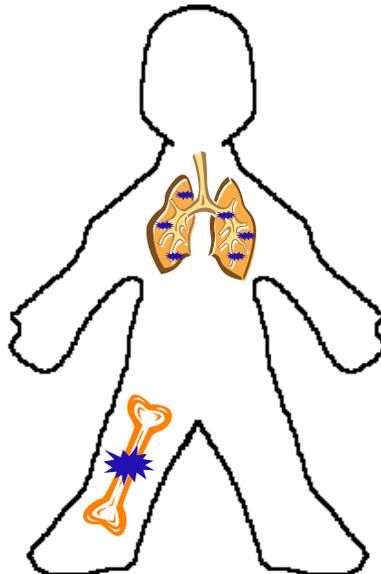
# Hospital autopsy

- Consent from legal next of kin required
  - Not same as medical power of attorney
  - Cannot pre-consent for autopsy
- Complete vs. restricted procedure
- Complete does not interfere with viewing

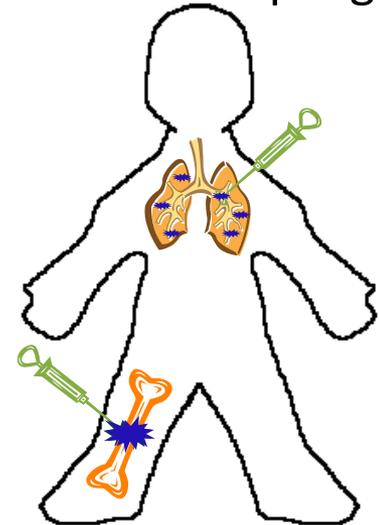
Full Autopsy



Limited Autopsy



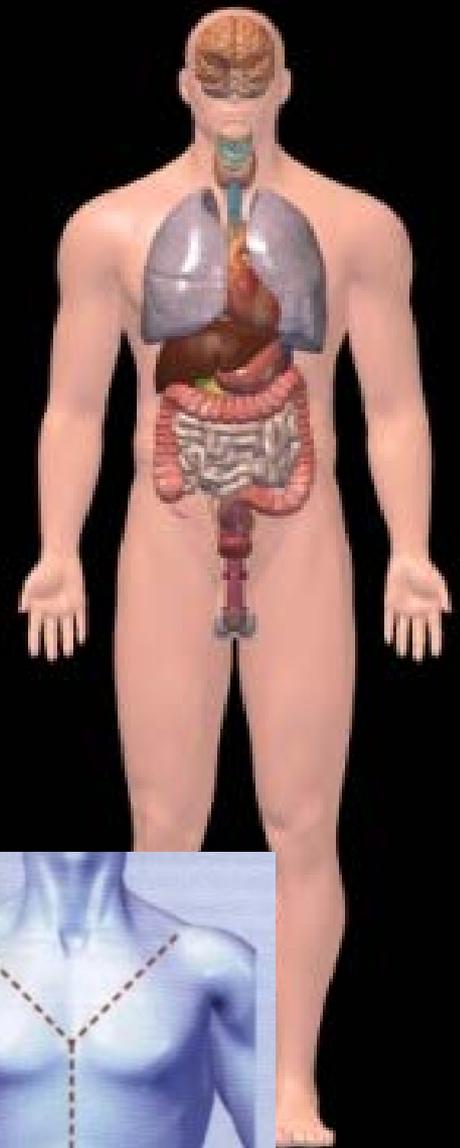
Postmortem  
Tissue Sampling



# Autopsy

- External examination
- Y or U-shaped incision
- Fluids collected & described
- Pneumothorax, PE, surgical sites
- Organs removed en bloc
- Brain, spinal cord, eyes
- Photographs

**Does not affect a funeral viewing**



# Autopsy Logistics

- 7 days a week, 8:30 AM to 3:30 PM start time
- Autopsy resident on pager 8:00 to 6:00, attending at night
- Can come down and observe, see organs or slides later
- No charge if JHH inpatient last year (affiliates different)
- DOA counts as inpatient for fees
- Do take private cases (charge to family & transport)
  
- Preliminary autopsy diagnosis w/in 48 hrs
- Slides processed 3 – 7 days later
- Slides signed out by trainee w attending
- Brain fixes for 2 weeks, sectioned, slides reviewed
- Final autopsy diagnosis usually w/in 30 days

# Stakeholder perceptions of autopsy

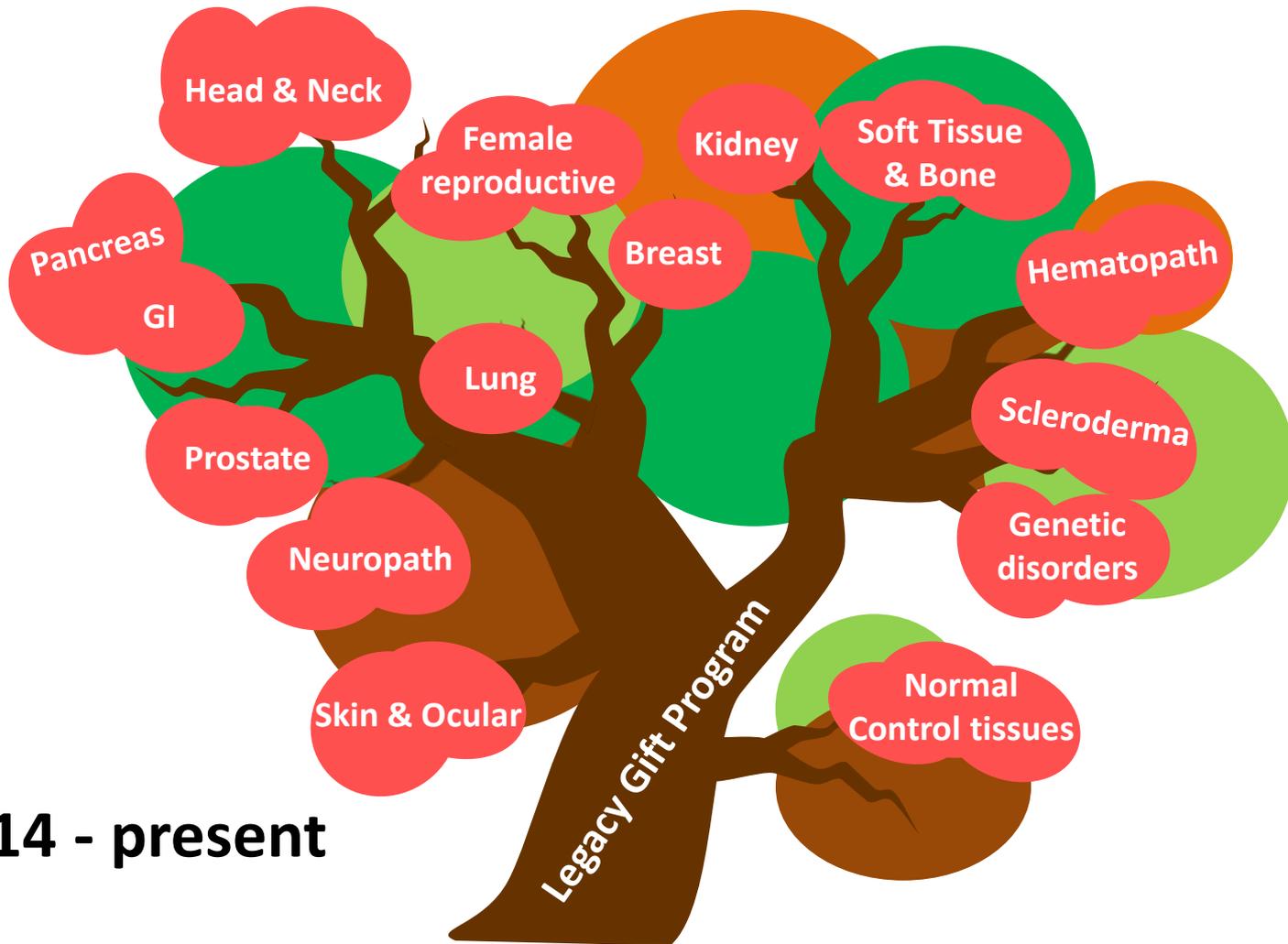
- 6 focus groups w families, physicians, staff
- Knowledge low in all groups
- Agreement that can provide major benefits
- **Physicians: worry about pt discomfort**
- **Patients: worry about logistics**
- Physician identified as best person to discuss
- Timing patient and family dependent
- Training needed for providers

# Why do rapid research autopsies?

- Collection of rare neoplasms
- Location & amount of tissue only limited by autopsy consent
- Demonstrate effects of treatment
- Investigate genetic mutations **AFTER** worsening/metastasis
- Contribution by families



# JHH Legacy Gift Rapid Research Autopsy



**2014 - present**

# Bereaved parents suggestions

- 33/38 parents of children with DIPG who had research autopsy surveyed after death
- 94% - was the right decision
- 82% - would decide same way again
- None agreed that choice did harm
- Chose to help others, find meaning in donation, hope for progress to cure and for closure
- Desired more concrete information about autopsy process



THE JOHNS HOPKINS  
HOSPITAL

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DATE OF  
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(Addressograph)

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Autopsy consent form

- Smooth process for families
- Make sure consent not rejected



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## Identification

TWO unique patient identifiers that match the toe tag and/or ankle/ wristband:

- Name and DOB or
- Name and MRN or
- Patient ID sticker with at least two of the above.



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Relationship

Relationship of the deceased to the LEGAL NEXT-OF-KIN who is signing the consent form.

# WHO CAN LEGALLY GIVE CONSENT FOR AUTOPSY IN THE STATE OF MARYLAND?

MD STATE STATUTES § 5-501 AND §5-509) STATE WHO MAY GIVE CONSENT FOR AUTOPSY, AND CONTROL DISPOSITION OF THE REMAINS

IN ORDER, the legal next-of-kin is as follows:

- (1) The surviving spouse or domestic partner of the decedent;
- (2) An adult child of the decedent;
- (3) A parent of the decedent;
- (4) An adult brother or sister of the decedent;
- (5) A person acting as a representative of the decedent under a signed authorization of the decedent;
- (6) The guardian of the person of the decedent at the time of the decedent's death, if one has been appointed; or
- (7) In the absence of any person under items (1) through (6)..., any other person willing to assume the responsibility to act as the authorizing agent for purposes of arranging the final disposition of the decedent's body.

# POWER OF ATTORNEY (POA) **ENDS** WHEN THE PATIENT DIES!!!

The POA may not legally sign the autopsy consent, unless they also happen to be the highest order next-of-kin listed on the previous slide.

# Consent Examples

- The deceased patient is divorced. Can her son sign the autopsy consent?

Yes. If there is no current spouse, an adult child is next in the legal order.

- The brother of the deceased has been visiting in the hospital and wants to sign the autopsy consent.

If the patient is married (even separated), the spouse comes before a sibling and must be the one to consent, even if that person is physically somewhere else.

- Could the decedent's uncle who had Power of Attorney sign the autopsy consent?

Only if there is no spouse, no adult children, no living parents, and no siblings, in that order.



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Name of patient

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Correct spelling!



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# Limitations

Must select  
**NONE** (complete autopsy which includes the brain, eyes, and all organs) or **LIMITATIONS** (specify restrictions).

Body regions best for restrictions.

# Limitations

- Family's wishes always accommodated.
- Limited autopsy can limit what can be learned, especially about cause of death.
- No incisions including for brain will be visible on clothed body at viewing.
- Common limitations: “no head”, “no eyes”, “chest only”, “chest and abdomen”.
- Call autopsy pager for help!



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Responsibility for disposition

Encourage families to make funeral or donation arrangements as soon as they can.



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Final report distribution

Default is not to send;  
NOK may call autopsy office also.



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Next of kin & witness  
signatures

- Sign, print, DATE & TIME
- Contact information
- Any adult can witness



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(Addressograph)

CONSENT FOR POST-MORTEM EXAMINATION (AUTOPSY)

The post-mortem examination (autopsy) is a medical procedure that is performed to learn more about the cause of death and the reasons for that death.

The examination uses surgical incisions to allow observation and removal of organs. These incisions will not involve the face or any other part of the body that would be visible during viewing.

I THEREFORE GIVE PERMISSION TO THE DOCTORS OF THE JOHNS HOPKINS HOSPITAL AND THEIR ASSISTANTS TO PERFORM AN AUTOPSY ON THE DECEASED BODY OF

MY RELATIONSHIP NAME OF PATIENT

I authorize the examination, removal, imaging, and retention of organs, tissues, implanted devices, and fluids as the pathologists deem necessary for diagnosis, education, research, and quality improvement.

I understand that I may limit the extent of the examination or the retention or imaging of organs, tissues, or devices. I understand that limitations may decrease the information obtained from the examination.

Limitations: None. Permission is granted for a complete postmortem examination (autopsy) including eyes, with examination, removal, imaging and retention of material as the pathologists deem appropriate for the purposes described, and for the disposition of this material.

Permission is granted for a postmortem examination (autopsy) with the following limitations and conditions (please specify):

I ASSUME FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR BURIAL OR OTHER DISPOSITION OF THE DECEASED.

Please send me a copy of the final report. I do not want a copy of the report at this time.

Signature of person authorizing autopsy Printed name of person authorizing autopsy Date Time

Address of person authorizing autopsy Telephone number(s) of person authorizing autopsy

Signature of person obtaining/witnessing consent Printed name of person obtaining/witnessing consent Pager Date Time

Interpreter's Printed name Interpreter's Signature (if in-person) Date Time

ADMITTING OFFICE

Printed names and pagers of JHH physicians to be notified

Printed names of others to receive report. Please put addresses on the back of this sheet.

Interpreter signature (if used)

- Must be official JHH interpreter



THE JOHNS HOPKINS  
HOSPITAL

NAME OF  
PATIENT \_\_\_\_\_  
DATE OF  
BIRTH \_\_\_\_\_

(Addressograph)

CONSENT FOR POST-MORTEM EXAMINATION (AUTOPSY)

The post-mortem examination (autopsy) is a medical procedure that is performed to learn more about the cause of death and the reasons for that death. Many families find this helpful. Each examination also contributes to our medical knowledge and can help other patients who have the same problems.

The examination uses surgical incisions to allow observation and removal of organs. These incisions will not involve the face or any other part of the body that would be visible during viewing. The clothed body will look the same with or without the postmortem examination.

I THEREFORE GIVE PERMISSION TO THE DOCTORS OF THE JOHNS HOPKINS HOSPITAL AND THEIR ASSISTANTS TO PERFORM AN AUTOPSY ON THE DECEASED BODY OF

MY \_\_\_\_\_  
RELATIONSHIP \_\_\_\_\_ NAME OF PATIENT \_\_\_\_\_

I authorize the examination, removal, imaging, and retention of organs, tissues, implanted devices, and fluids as the pathologists deem necessary for diagnosis, education, research, and quality improvement. I understand that the remaining organs and tissues will be disposed of appropriately and in accordance with the law.

I understand that I may limit the extent of the examination or the retention or imaging of organs, tissues, or devices. I understand that limitations may decrease the information obtained from the examination. I have been given the opportunity to ask any questions that I may have regarding the scope or purpose of the procedure.

**Limitations:**  **None.** Permission is granted for a complete postmortem examination (autopsy) including eyes, with examination, removal, imaging and retention of material as the pathologists deem appropriate for the purposes described, and for the disposition of this material.

**Permission is granted for a postmortem examination (autopsy) with the following limitations and conditions (please specify):**

\_\_\_\_\_

I ASSUME FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR BURIAL OR OTHER DISPOSITION OF THE DECEASED.

Please send me a copy of the final report.  I do not want a copy of the report at this time.

Signature of person authorizing autopsy \_\_\_\_\_ Printed name of person authorizing autopsy \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

Address of person authorizing autopsy \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone number(s) of person authorizing autopsy \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of person obtaining/witnessing consent \_\_\_\_\_ Printed name of person obtaining/witnessing consent \_\_\_\_\_ Pager \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

Interpreter's Printed name \_\_\_\_\_ Interpreter's Signature (if in person) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

ADMITTING OFFICE \_\_\_\_\_

Printed names and pagers of JHH physicians to be notified \_\_\_\_\_

Printed names of others to receive report. Please put addresses on the back of this sheet. \_\_\_\_\_

Other information

- Optional: contact info for clinical team or others to receive copy.

“Dave's wish was to donate his organs to people who might be able to use them to continue their own lives in better health. ...he was happy to share it in the hopes that the researchers could learn something from his misfortune that might help others in the future. He hoped his donation would inspire others to do the same.”



## *In Memoriam*



“Tyler is remembered by his family and friends as a brave soul who cared deeply for others. He hopes his contributions to cancer research will inspire others to consider how they can contribute as well.”



“We find comfort and strength in knowing that Spencer's legacy will live on through her tumor donation, and that she is giving other children a better chance to live as they truly deserve. As Spencer's parents, it is our sincere hope that Spencer's story will inspire others to consider donating.”

“Gail succumbed after a 7 month battle with cholangiocarcinoma ...her last gift to us all was of herself...”



“Barry died in hospice care surrounded by family...we will carry on his desire to Wage Hope...”



# Autopsy pearls

- Hopkins patients have a right to an autopsy – ask all families.
- Autopsy is free for inpatients within one year.
- Legal next of kin must sign consent, not necessarily medical power of attorney.
- We can learn from all autopsies!
- The Autopsy Division is here to help you – CORUS Autopsy resident or attending on call.



Thank you!

Questions?

