I. **PURPOSE**

To provide institutional guidelines regarding residency autopsy responsibilities.

II. **SCOPE**

This policy is applicable to all members of the housestaff.

III. **DEFINITIONS**

Housestaff - refers to interns, residents and subspecialty residents (fellows) enrolled in a RUTGERS Robert Wood Johnson Medical School postgraduate training program.

IV. **RESPONSIBILITY/REQUIREMENTS**

To establish an institutional policy regarding the utilization of autopsies as a medical education training tool.

Policy:

All deaths must be reviewed and autopsies performed whenever possible. Autopsies are an essential part of a house officer's education. He/she must make an effort to secure permission for an autopsy on all patients who expire on the teaching service. Housestaff should be present at autopsies or should review the gross pathological specimens of the autopsies performed on their patients and should review the autopsy reports. Formal teaching sessions with reviews of autopsy, biopsy, and surgical pathology cases must be regularly scheduled.

Protocol for Autopsy Request

In all cases, it is the responsibility of the attending physician to obtain consent for autopsy. The request for consent must be documented in the medical record. A note must be entered in the medical record if circumstances exist which, in the judgment of the attending physician, prohibit requesting a consent for autopsy.

When a patient dies, a house officer should determine if the Medical Examiner's Office must be notified. If the medical examiner declines the case, housestaff are obligated to offer the family an autopsy. When a patient is pronounced dead, it is the responsibility of the house officer to inform the patient's family about the autopsy examination. This should not be perceived as an emotionally charged issue.

The following points of information should/must be communicated to the family:
A. The person taking responsibility for the body, usually the next of kin, may give permission for the autopsy.

B. There is no charge to the family for the autopsy service.

C. The autopsy may confirm the clinical diagnosis or uncover additional contributory causes for the patient's death.

D. The autopsy contributes toward improved patient care, research and physician education.

A packet of forms is available in the units. Assistance with previous or pending autopsies, eg., facilitating the process or arranging a gross review, can be directed to the Autopsy Service Director.

For further information and reports:

RWJUH Admitting Office # (732) 937-8602
Autopsy Pathology Directors Office # (732) 937-8651
RWJUH Autopsy Room # (732) 828-3000; ext. 5802
RWJUH Pathologist-on-call # (732) 828-3000; Pager (732) 880-6256
Pathology Residents' Room #732) 828-3000, ext. 2087
Medical Examiner of Middlesex County # (732) 826-0331
SPUH- Nursing Unit Manager, day shift, # (732) 745-8600
SPUH- Chief of Autopsy Service/Autopsy Room: # (732) 745-8600, ext. 8234
SPUH- Autopsy Room: # (732) 745-8600, ext. 8239
SPUH- Pathologist on-call: # (732) 390-2583
The Medical Center at Princeton: # (609) 497-4351
Muhlenberg Regional Medical Center: # (908) 668-2270
Deborah Heart and Lung Center: # (609) 893-6611, ext. 4269
Jersey Shore Medical Center # (732) 776-4148
VA New Jersey Health Care System: (973) 676-1000, ext.

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