

Activity report 2020

Autopsy pathology working group (WG AUT)

Chairperson (2016-2020): G. Cecilie Alfsen, Oslo, Norway

Secretary: Myriam Haab, Homburg, Germany

Members and general activity

At the end of 2020, the WG AUT counts 76 members, an increase of over 18% in comparison to January 2020.

The 2020 will be remembered as the year of the SARS CoV-2 pandemic.

- ESP WG joint meeting in February 22th in Brussels:
Chair attended. Shortly thereafter, from March, most of the world went into lock-down, and all further meeting and course activities were cancelled.
- Virtual Business meeting with elections, November 26th:
19 members attended.
Election of new chair and co-chair 2021-2022:
Chair: Myriam Haab, Homburg, Germany
Co-chair: Carlos M Pontinha, Lisbon, Portugal

Contributions to the 2020 ECP/IAP Congress December 6.-8th:

Due to the pandemic, the congress was delayed until December and eventually went virtual. The WG AUT participated in two joint short courses and one symposium:

- VSC-01: Joint Short Course Autopsy Pathology / Infectious Diseases Pathology: COVID-19 in the autopsy room (Chairs: Carlos Marques Pontinha, Portugal, Vsevolod Zinserling, Russian Federation, Cecilie Alfsen, Norway). 615 participants attended/were logged in.
- VSC-10: Joint Short Course Cardiovascular Pathology / Autopsy Pathology: Detection of myocardial infarction at autopsy: current diagnostic tools, interpretation pearls and potential pitfalls (Chairs: Katarzyna Michaud, Switzerland, Cecilie Alfsen, Norway.) 220 participants attended/were logged in.
- VSY-19: Autopsy Pathology: Quality of medical autopsies (Chairs: Michael Osborn, United Kingdom, Samuel Rotman, Switzerland, Myriam Haab, Germany). 168 participants attended/were logged in.

Questions, which were asked at the end of each session (30 minutes reserved for Q&A), had to be written during the talks, and were visible for all after acceptance by the chairs. As the time for introduction of the single speakers by the chairs were taken from the Q&A-part, the Q&A sessions were shorter than expected.

- Oral Free Papers were presented in the IT in Pathology/Other Topics
- PS-12: Poster session: 29 Posters
- E-PS-01: 16 E-Posters were presented in the autopsy category

Further activities

- As planned in Nice 2019, minimum Standards for autopsy procedures have been prepared by a working group of 13 members from the WG. The standards will be presented to the ESP publication task force and submitted to Virchow Archives.

- Contribution to paper on MITS in COVID-19-deaths, main author Natalia Rakislova. Under submission.

Plans for Gothenburg 2021

We sincerely hope the vaccine will be effective enough to allow a physical meeting. In addition to the OFPs and posters, the WG AUT hopes to participate in the following activities:

- **Research on Autopsy Material.**
Symposium or short course.
Suggested jointly with WG Molecular pathology and the affiliated societies on Neuropathology, and cardiovascular pathology (Euro-CNS and AECVP). Lectures on the subject of publication, rapid autopsy, biobanking etc. are planned.
- **Reporting the Cause of death. The art of constructing a chain of events.**
"Slide" seminar: Participant will be presented the medical story and autopsy findings, and are asked to group the findings according to WHO in a report.
Introduction to the seminar: about Cause of death statistics. Cases will be collected and presented from WG-members.
- **Talking to clinicians about autopsy - or how to increase the autopsy rates?**
Short course.
Lectures on when and how to talk to clinicians, how to organize it etc., with the aim of increasing the autopsy rates.

Concluding remarks from the past chair:

In 2020, WG activities have focused on quality. A minimum standard has been outlined. The speakers at the ESP-IAP-2020 symposium, Jody Hooper from USA (the co-editor of the book „Autopsy in the 21st century“, Springer 2019) and Sebastian Lucas from UK were lecturing over the importance of quality and how to achieve it.

Despite being a medical procedure, the autopsy itself is rarely the subject for quality control. The autopsy results are still written in prose, and templates are rarely used, which makes research at larger scale difficult. The procedure is often left to the least experienced doctors in training. With pathologists struggling with the daily workload of histo- or cytopathology, supervision of residents in the autopsy room becomes a balancing item. Long turnover times is a problem and makes the procedure less relevant to the clinicians.

The situation seems grave, with decreasing autopsy rates in all European countries. What can be done?

First: We need to focus on expertise! In my opinion, Autopsy pathology should become a subspecialty. Start working on it!

Second: The medical autopsy should be highlighted as one of the cornerstones of quality assurance of medical practise. Keep talking about it!

With these words: Thank you for letting me chair the working group during these four years.

G. Cecilie Alfsen, Norway.
December 21th 2020