

Autopsy

An autopsy is required in all violent or unattended deaths to determine the cause and possible manner of death. An unattended death is one for which there is no preexisting illness, medical condition, or reasonable explanation.

Where there is reason to believe foul play is involved in a human death, and when a request is made by an authorized agency, Laboratory personnel may assist a forensic pathologist during the autopsy.

I. Procedure for the Officer

- A.** Obtain authorization for the autopsy from the coroner or medical examiner. This authorization must be in writing and delivered to the pathologist prior to performance of the autopsy.
- B.** A complete set of x-rays should be taken of the entire body. If metal fragments are detected, a side view should be taken to help locate the exact position of the fragments.
- C.** Record the following and any other information considered pertinent:
 1. Name and date of birth of deceased (if known).
 2. Any emergency medical treatment performed on victim.
 3. Time, date, and location of autopsy.
 4. Names and titles of persons in attendance.
- D.** Inform the pathologist of all pertinent information relative to the case.
- E.** If the pathologist is unaware of the specimens required by the Laboratory for their analyses or the methods preferred by the Laboratory to recover and preserve specimens, provide him/her with Section II of this chapter.
- F.** Photograph the body as outlined in [Chapter 2, Forensic Photography](#), IV. Autopsy Photographic Procedure.
- G.** Recover the (new) sheet used to convey the victim from the scene to the hospital or morgue. Air dry if wet or bloodstained and collect trace evidence on paper placed under the sheet while drying. Place all in a separate clean paper bag. Avoid unnecessary handling

of the sheet to prevent loss of trace evidence. Properly mark for identification.

- H. Bindings used to restrain victim, if any, should be recovered by cutting an area where no knots, cuts, tears, or stains are present. Do not cut through knots or stains. Mark the cut ends to distinguish from existing ends of bindings or twine.
- I. Bite marks (see Chapter 7, Bite Marks). The first step in the processing of bite marks is to photographically document the impression. The photography is critical and the specific method is described in Chapter 2, Forensic Photography, VI. Pattern Impression Photography, Bite Marks. Because of the specific requirements to produce workable evidence, it is recommended to request technical assistance from the Laboratory. IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT TO SWAB THE BITE MARK AREA FOR DNA EVIDENCE COLLECTION. This can be accomplished by using the Wisconsin State Crime Laboratory BIOLOGICAL SPECIMENS collection kit (see Appendix B, Collection Kits, IV. Kits available through the Laboratory) or by following the procedure described below:
 1. After the bite mark is thoroughly documented photographically, the impression should be swabbed following the procedure outlined in Chapter 6, Sexual Offenses, II. Transitory Evidence, Bite Marks.
 2. When three dimensional characteristics are apparent, the evidence can be further documented with an impression material. It can be difficult to obtain the detail necessary. Technical assistance is available by calling the Laboratory for a referral to a Board Certified expert. There is a nominal fee for this forensic specialty.
- J. Recover clothing of victim after it has been examined by the pathologist. Note any cutting or tearing of clothing by anyone who may have rendered first aid or others such as the attending physician or the pathologist. Place each item of clothing in a separate clean paper bag. Air dry if wet or bloodstained. Avoid unnecessary handling of clothing to prevent loss of trace evidence. Properly mark for identification.
- K. After examination by the pathologist, all bruises and wounds should be photographed. Scaled and unscaled views should be taken prior to and after washing of affected areas. Scaling should be accomplished following procedures outlined in Chapter 2, Forensic

Photography, V. Scaling Photographs and VI. Pattern Impression Photography.

- L.** In cases where the victim may have, or is suspected of having had physical contact with the assailant, recover standard specimens of body and head hairs and package them separately, by location, in clean containers. See **Chapter 21, Hairs and Fibers**.
- M.** Fingerprint and palm print the victim. Also consider footprints. Investigation at the crime scene may reveal palm prints or footprints. Personal identifications may be confirmed by footprints. If the victim is too young to have been fingerprinted, hospital records may contain newborn footprints.
- N.** Package, seal and label all items recovered making sure the pathologist describes the contents and places his mark of identification on each item or container. It is important that the officer in attendance be equipped with adequate containers and sealing apparatus to package clothing, body fluids, organs, hair samples, fingernail scrapings, etc.
- O.** Request that the pathologist forward a copy of the autopsy report to the coroner/medical examiner and the Laboratory.

II. Procedure for the Pathologist

- A.** A complete series of full body x-rays should be taken of the victim.
- B.** Collect the clothing of the victim by carefully removing them in a normal manner. Should this not be possible, they can be removed by cutting. Great care must be taken not to cut through or near any cuts, tears, holes, or trace evidence or areas that might have evidentiary significance.
- C.** Recover wound areas:
 1. Photograph wounds as outlined in **Chapter 2, Forensic Photography**, IV. Autopsy Photographic Procedure, V. Scaling Photographs and VI. Pattern Impression Photography.
 2. The body may be sketched and wound areas diagrammed on anatomical outlines similar to those shown in **Figure 25-1**. All drawings should be initialed and dated with the case number on each page.

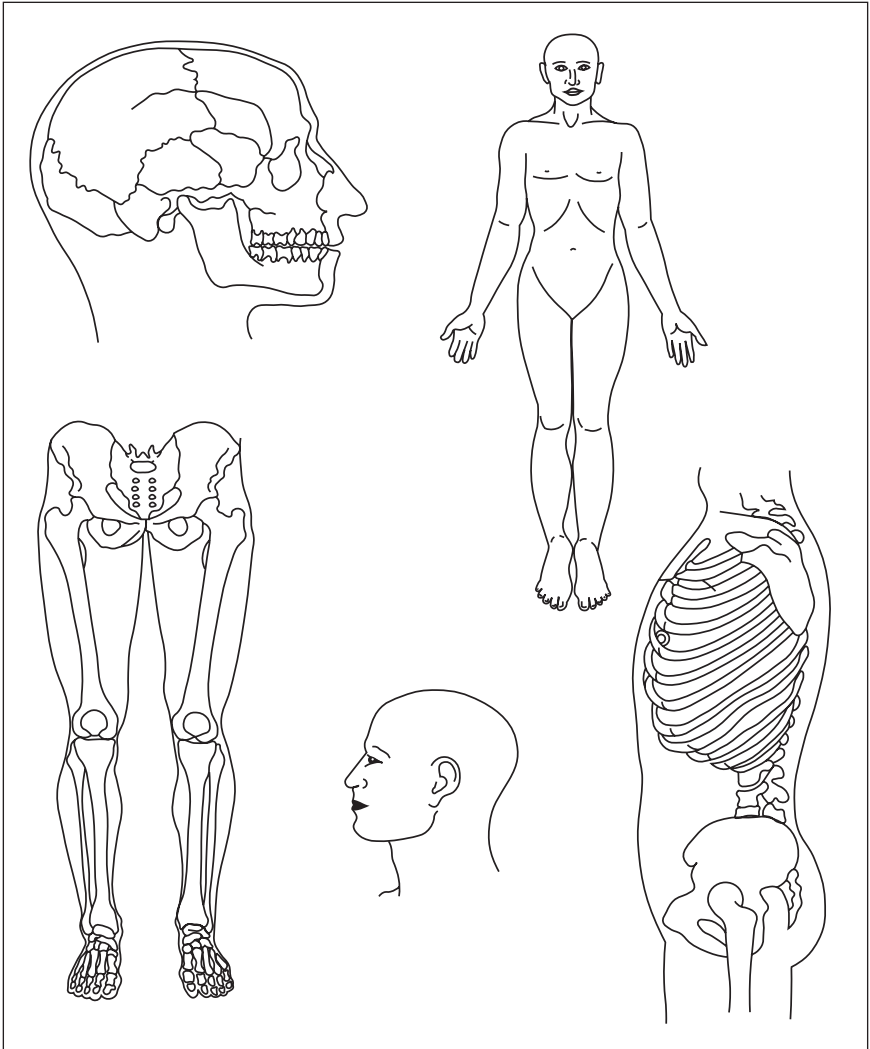


Fig. 25-1
Anatomical Outlines

3. Tissue sections surrounding gunshot wounds may be recovered as shown in Figure 25-2.
 - a. The tissue section should contain most or all of the powder staining and/or residues. For proper orientation, it should be removed in the form of a tear drop. The “point” of the section of tissue should be towards the top of the head. If the bullet penetrated bone, obtain a section of the bone

penetrated and underlying bullet track surrounding the bullet hole. The recovered sections of tissue and/or bone should be placed in a wide mouth screw cap jar with a ten percent solution of formaldehyde, sealed, and labeled.

- b. Do not submit these sections to the Laboratory. The Laboratory does not analyze tissue specimens for the presence of gunshot residue. They should be examined by a Forensic Pathologist or retained for future use.

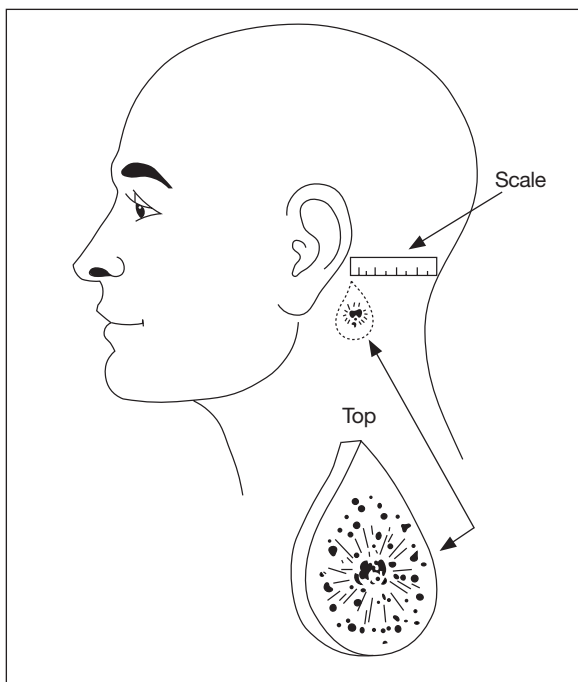


Fig. 25-2
*Recovery of
wound area*

- D. Collect all evidence, including fragments of bullets or other objects which have pierced or adhered to the skin. The pathologist should place a mark of identification on the sealed container in which the recovered evidence is placed. An alternative method is to mark the individual item and the sealed container. See Chapter 8, [Firearms and Ammunition](#), for marking and packaging procedure. In cases involving gunshot deaths, or gunshot injuries suspected to have been self-inflicted, it is important to obtain measurements of arm length (fingertip to shoulder, arm extended). It is also important to photograph all bloodstains on all exposed areas of flesh, such as hands, wrists and arms.

- E.** Additional specimens that should routinely be collected at an autopsy (if applicable) and submitted to the Laboratory:
1. See Chapter 6, **Sexual Offenses** – collect the appropriate specimens for the situation.
 2. See Chapter 21, **Hairs and Fibers** – collect the appropriate specimens for the situation.
 3. See Chapter 28, **Toxicology** – collect the appropriate specimens for the situation.



Fig. 25-3
Many of the samples required for toxicological analysis can be collected using an Autopsy Kit available from the State Crime Laboratory in Madison. Specimens for sexual assault analysis should also be collected; especially in any homicide involving a female victim—even if sexual assault is not immediately suspected. A Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit is available for this purpose, also available through the Department of Administration, Document Sales as noted at the front of this booklet. There is a nominal charge for both kits. Additional information on sexual offenses can be found in Chapter 6.