

# Burial practices during COVID, role of autopsies and limitations

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# Disclosure

I have no conflict of interest in relation to this presentation.

# Session Objectives

To

- Understand the complexities associated with implementation of public health guidance vis-a-vis religious/cultural practices
- Discuss ways of balancing IPC needs with culture/religious traditions by community engagement
- Identify limitations to doing autopsies during the COVID pandemic in LMIC
- Appreciate the potential scientific and academic benefits of conduct of autopsies with a new disease

# Introduction

# Background

# Handling the dead for muslims

## **Fundamental belief of muslims:**

- Whether dead or alive, the human body—created by God in the perfect shape—must be given dignity and respect
- The burial of the deceased is a collective obligation, and an Islamic funeral is considered a community and a spiritual event; so many aspire to attend
- An important funeral rite in the Islamic faith is that burial take place as quickly as possible after death
- Quick burial (within 24hrs) to prevent the odour of death brought about by decay
- The faith prohibits cremation. Similarly, autopsies and embalment are strongly discouraged, Delay in burial is considered a desecration of the body
- Exhumation of bodies is considered the rights of God

# Body preparation procedures

- ❑ Ritual washing of the body is considered a collective duty for Muslims and is done to wash whatever impurities the body comes from the hospital with or to get rid of extra fluids that might still be in the body and religiously, it's like the body is getting ready for a final prayer. Washing is done either 3, 5 or 7 times
- ❑ The ritual washing is done by elders in the society whose job it is to do so, after which the body is wrapped in a simple white shroud before being buried.
- ❑ A special cart used to convey wrapped body to the local cemetery or grave
- ❑ The rule in Islamic law is that every dead body should be buried in a grave

# Adaptations during epidemics

# Christian Religion

## Fundamental belief

- A person has an eternal soul and a temporary body. And in after life, the soul is immortal but a new body will be given
- Cremation can be acceptable practice by the Christian – individual preference, but traditionally churches and cemeteries prefer that ashes be placed in a cremation urn and either buried or kept in a mausoleum, not scattered as done in Eastern religions
- Autopsies and embalming are allowed.
- A funeral is a religious service/ceremony where loved ones and friends gather to mark the passing of someone who was important to them, prayers are also made.
- Displaying the deceased and holding a wake is part of the rituals

# Community Engagement

# Benefits of autopsies in the study of new diseases

- ❑ Autopsy has been used to advance research and scholarly activities in a variety of ways.
- ❑ It helps in the determination of the exact cause of death & have led to discovery or critical clarification of many medical disorders
- ❑ It provides the unique opportunity to study the pathogenesis of different human disease processes and their influence on other organs in the human body eg ESRD leading to pericarditis and to malignant hypertension that could lead to thrombotic microangiopathy and strokes.
- ❑ Some parts/tissues of the human body not available for examination except by autopsy
- ❑ During this COVID, autopsy has revealed diffuse alveolar damage and the presence of blood clots indicating probabaly a coagulopathy

# Way forward

# Resources

- ❑ [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331538/WHO-COVID-19-IPC\\_DBMgmt-2020.1-eng.pdf](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331538/WHO-COVID-19-IPC_DBMgmt-2020.1-eng.pdf)
- ❑ [https://iris.paho.org/bitstream/handle/10665.2/52001/PAHOPHEIHMCovid1920002\\_eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://iris.paho.org/bitstream/handle/10665.2/52001/PAHOPHEIHMCovid1920002_eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)
- ❑ <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/COVID-19-safe-handling-of-bodies-or-persons-dying-from-COVID19.pdf>
- ❑ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2589871X20300309>
- ❑ [Autopsy biosafety. Autopsy pathology.](#)
- ❑ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7151890/>
- ❑ <https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2018/11/01/respect-for-the-dead-under-islamic-law-considerations-for-humanitarian-forensics/>
- ❑ <https://www.burialplanning.com/resources/religious-funerals-guide/non-religious-funerals-guide/>
- ❑ <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2020/3/31/muslims-suspend-traditional-funeral-rites-to-bury-coronavirus-martyrs>
- ❑ <https://www.soundvision.com/article/death-funeral-and-burial-during-coronavirus>
- ❑ <https://www.cdc.gov/poxvirus/monkeypox/clinicians/autopsy.html>
- ❑ LM Buja et al. The Importance of the Autopsy in Medicine: Perspectives of Pathology Colleagues. Acad Pathology 2019. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6410379/#!po=45.3125>

Thank  
you!



# Hidden Slide

- ❑ Separate isolation room infrastructure and better designed, safe sites
- ❑ There are 6 main categories of potential injury to pathologists and their assistants during the performance of an autopsy: mechanical injury, sharp force injury, electrical shock, chemical exposure, radiation exposure, and infection