

FORENSIC PATHOLOGY

Pathology and Laboratory Medicine

SCOPE OF PRACTICE

PGY-5

The ACGME accredited one-year, full-time training program is offered to one applicant each academic year. Trainees are responsible under supervision for scene investigations, post-mortem external examinations, autopsies (approximately 250), microscopic evaluation of tissues, interpretation of toxicology, completion of anatomic protocols, appearances in court upon occasion, and conferences with attorneys and investigators. Approximately 1500 autopsies, including a large percentage of homicides, are performed yearly. Trainees have the opportunity to assist in teaching police, coroners, lawyers, medical students and residents and are expected to participate in weekly conferences where difficult cases and subspecialty topics are discussed. Study of forensic application of anthropology, toxicology, crime scene, odontology, DNA/serology and ballistics will be performed at local, state or national centers. The fellow is expected to submit a forensic pathology-related article to a peer-reviewed journal for publication. Associated ACGME competencies are listed in parentheses following each (key at end of section).

Objectives

- The fellow will gain expertise in forensic pathology by performing autopsies and external examinations assigned to him/her in order to determine the cause and manner of death. **(PC, MK, PBL, ICS, PR, SBP)**
- As part of the post mortem examination, a written protocol will be prepared and reviewed. The protocol will contain appropriate interpretations of the gross, microscopic, toxicology, and other ancillary study findings. **(PC, MK, PBL, ICS, PR, SBP)**
- The fellow will document the autopsy findings photographically and with legible diagrams and will assure all digital media (x-ray, photographic) are archived during or immediately following each autopsy. **(PC, MK, ICS, PR)**
- During the course of the post mortem examination, appropriate bodily fluids/tissues will be

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collected and submitted for toxicologic examination, metabolic testing, microbiological cultures, vitreous analyte analysis, and/or additional ancillary testing. Correct protocols will be followed. The results will then be interpreted in the context of the history and autopsy findings. **(PC, MK, PBL, SBP)**

- The fellow will demonstrate the ability to perform each autopsy skill in the presence of an attending pathologist. **(PC, MK, ICS, PR)**
- The fellow will develop an opinion as to the cause and manner of death of each case performed prior to discussing the final report with the attending pathologist. Prior to case sign out, the fellow will interact with the attending regarding this opinion. **(PC, MK, PBL, ICS, PR, SBP)**
- The fellow will maintain an up-to-date log that includes autopsies (with description of type of case, cause and manner of death, and decedent demographics), external examinations, death scene visits, and observations of or providing court testimony. **(PC, PBL, PR)**
- The fellow will obtain training (didactic and/or hands on) in medicolegal death scene investigation, case intake and handling, and case disposition determination by interactions with the Charleston County Coroner Office and/or formal coursework. **(PC, MK, PBL, ICS, PR, SBP)**
- The fellow will gain experience in forensic anthropology through coursework, referrals to a local forensic anthropologist, online training, and/or attendance at the Annual Forensic Anthropology Course (Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Maryland). **(PC, MK, PBL, ICS, PR, SBP)**
- The fellow will attend the Forensic Science Workshop held at the National Forensic Science Technology Center in Largo, Florida ([NFSTC Home Page](#)) during any year it is offered. When not offered, the Fellow will complete the online course: Introduction to Crime Scene Investigation and may also complete the Intermediate online workshop. **(PC, MK, PBL, PR, SBP)**

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- The fellow will read the “Position Paper on the Medical Examiner Release of Organs and Tissues for Transplantation” published online by the National Association of Medical Examiners (<http://www.thename.org>) and be prepared to discuss the application of these guidelines to our coroner system. (PC, MK, PBL, ICS, SBP)
- The fellow will visit death scenes, document his/her findings, interpret pertinent findings and provide a written (electronic) report to the principal pathologist on the case prior to case inception. The fellow will become expert at obtaining appropriate and pertinent case information during death scene investigation and – whether or not the scene is attended - during verbal interactions with investigating agencies (e.g. Coroner, law enforcement, South Carolina Law Enforcement Division, etc). (PC, MK, PBL, ICS, PR, SBP)
- The fellow will gain additional knowledge and expertise about forensic pathology by reading specialty text books and current literature, using electronic or recorded media and participating in case review conferences and by other resources as necessary (e.g., ASCP Check Samples, CAP FR Surveys). (PC, MK, PBL)
- The Fellow will demonstrate his/her knowledge base upon entering the program and demonstrate improvement of knowledge base near completion of the program by completing the American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP) Forensic In-Service Examination ([FISE](#)) once in the fall and once in the spring. (PC, MK, PBL, SBP)
- The fellow will organize and/or participate in the bi-weekly Autopsy Conference as scheduled. (PC, MK, PBL, ICS, PR, SBP)
- The fellow will attend and participate in the weekly bi-Autopsy Section administrative meeting, as scheduled. (PC, PBL, ICS, PR, SBP)
- The fellow will be available for service work during normal coverage hours, and as such, will be responsible for being the initial contact person for coroners and other investigating

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agencies referring cases to or inquiring about cases in the Forensic Section. **(PC, ICS, PR)**

- The fellow will instruct rotating residents and medical students in the proper techniques of forensic autopsies. This will include instruction in proper dictating methods, paper and electronic data recording and retrieval, review of microscopic slides, toxicologic studies, and ancillary studies, and formation of the cause and manner of death in each case the fellow supervises. **(PC, MK, ICS, PR)**
- The fellow will take at-home pager call including one weekend per month and weekdays as necessary for coverage. In addition to regular case service work during the week, the fellow will be available for case service work for one weekend every 3 to 4 weeks. **(PC, PR)**
- The fellow will follow-up with the coroner(s) after all cases and s/he will clearly and politely explain findings. **(PC, MK, PBL, ICS, PR, SBP)**
- If a case requires research such as contacting the coroner, contacting law enforcement, reviewing medical records, researching literature, calling the toxicologist, etc., the fellow will do so. **(PC, MK, PBL, ICS, PR, SBP)**
- The fellow will complete cases timely and accurately. **(PC, PR)**
- The fellow will observe court testimony by staff pathologists when possible. **(PC, PBL, PR, SBP)**
- The fellow will testify in court regarding cases s/he performed as possible. **(PC, MK, PBL, ICS, PR, SBP)**
- The fellow will attend daily pathology department conferences at his/her discretion; forensic pathology topic conference attendance is mandatory. **(PC, MK, PBL, ICS, PR, SBP)**

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- The fellow will prepare and submit an abstract to a national forensic pathology forum (AAFS, NAME) and will have the opportunity to present the abstract at a national meeting if accepted. In addition, the fellow will prepare a manuscript of his/her research project and submit same for publication. **(PC, MK, PBL, ICS, PR, SBP)**
- The fellow will participate as an “expert witness” in an in-house mock court proceeding. **(PC, MK, PBL, ICS, PR, SBP)**

Relevance to the ACGME Core Competencies is designated after each objective as follows:

- Patient Care = PC
- Medical Knowledge = MK
- Practice-based learning and improvement = PBL
- Interpersonal and communication skills = ICS
- Professionalism = PR
- Systems-based practice = SBP