

The Prevalence of Blood-Borne Viral Infections among Autopsy Cases in Jordan

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Abstract : Background: Morgues are high-risk areas for the spread of infection from the cadavers to the staff during the postmortem examination. Infection can spread from corpses to workers by the airborne route, by direct contact, or from needle and sharp object injuries. Objective: Knowledge about the prevalence of these infections among autopsies is prudent to appreciate any risk of transmission and to further enforce safety measures. Method: A total of 242 autopsies were tested. Age ranged from 3 days to 94 years (median 75.5 years, mean 45.3 (21.9 ± SD)). There were 172 (71%) males. Results: The cause of death was considered natural in 137 (56.6%) cases, accidental in 89 (36.8%), homicidal in 9 (3.7%), suicidal in 4 (1.7%), and unknown in 3 (1.2%). Hepatitis B surface antigen was positive in 5 (2.1%) cases. Hepatitis C virus antibody was detected in 5 (2.1%) cases and the hepatitis C virus polymerase chain reaction was positive in 2 of them (0.8%). HIV antibody was not detected in any of the cases. Conclusions: Autopsies can be associated with exposure to blood borne viruses. Autopsies performed during the study period were tested for hepatitis B surface antigen, hepatitis C virus antibody, and human immunodeficiency virus antibody. Positive tests were subsequently confirmed by polymerase chain reaction. There is low prevalence of infections with these viruses in our autopsy cases. However, the risk of transmission remains a threat. Healthcare workers in the forensic departments should adhere to standard precautions.

Keywords : autopsy, hepatitis B virus, hepatitis C virus, human immunodeficiency virus, Jordan

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