

Dear Funeral Home Director,

Occasionally, a family that has lost a loved one under unknown or questionable circumstances wishes to have a postmortem examination performed on their deceased relative. If the death did not occur within the jurisdiction of the Allegheny County medical examiner or the coroner of one of the surrounding counties, and the circumstances are such as not to permit the procedure to be done at a local hospital, then the family has to make arrangements for a private autopsy.

Over the past 45 years, I have had the opportunity to provide these professional services to bereaved families throughout our region. Many cases involving black lung benefits for retired coal miners and other kinds of industrial claims have been resolved based upon my medical opinions, written reports and testimony, when required.

Sometimes, next-of-kin are anxious to learn about specific disease processes – for example, Alzheimer’s disease – because of genetic concerns for surviving and even future closely related family members. In light of rapidly advancing medical technologies and increasingly sophisticated preventive and therapeutic capabilities, postmortem findings can play a major beneficial role in the well-being and extended life span of other family members.

Repeat autopsies are occasionally called for in a variety of legal situations, both civil and criminal. While postmortem findings of a physical, tangible nature should be objectively noted and described with uniformity, it is not at all infrequent that interpretations of those findings result in significantly different subjective opinions by two or more pathologists. Whether the legal controversy deals with a question of medical malpractice, a work injury, or an allegation or suspicion of homicide, a second review and opinion may prove to be quite important.

It should be noted that a deceased body can be transported by livery service, or sent by airline, from one state to another for an autopsy to be performed. Such physical arrangements are much less cumbersome and expensive than is generally believed. Similarly, exhumation for purposes of an original or repeat postmortem examination should be seriously contemplated for many reasons, medical or legal. These arrangements are handled through local courts and state authorities, usually without any problem, just as long as the request is made by the legally authorized next-of-kin.

I am writing to apprise you and your colleagues of my availability to perform private autopsies for families, whatever their reason or objective may be. With my legal background, coupled with my 45 years of experience as an actively practicing anatomic, clinical and forensic pathologist, I believe I am able to provide an overall approach and broad understanding of any kind of medical and medical-legal inquiry.

These private postmortem examinations are performed by me personally at Carlow University, which is conveniently situated on Forbes Avenue in the Oakland neighborhood of Pittsburgh. We are quite flexible in making arrangements for such cases, which we do seven days a week, morning, afternoon or evening. Special arrangements can be made for autopsies to be done after funeral services have been completed if that proves necessary, although it is much more preferable from a diagnostic standpoint to perform an autopsy on an unembalmed body.

Should you desire any additional information at this time, or should you have occasion to advise a family in the future regarding a private autopsy, please contact my associate, Joseph Mancuso, who is a licensed funeral director and embalmer, at 412-478-0169 or 412-431-2253. I can be reached at 412-281-9090 during regular workdays and at 412-521-2881 on weekends and evenings.

Please be assured of our willingness and desire to cooperate with you to the fullest extent possible in any case in which a family is seeking a private autopsy and your funeral home is involved.

Thank you for your consideration of this information.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Cyril H. Wecht". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial 'C'.

Cyril H. Wecht, M.D., J.D.