Forensic Histopathology and Forensic Medicine Practice in Saudi Arabia: Practical Approach and Challenges

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Abstract

Background: Forensic medicine services in Saudi Arabia are fundamentally performed by forensic medicine specialists. Medical legal autopsy is done exclusively at forensic medicine centers, while hospital autopsy is not permissible according to the current legislations. Tissue sampling during autopsies for microscopic examination is usually done in the absence of pathology specialists due to many reasons. Aim: The current study aimed to determine the degree of awareness and involvement of pathology staff in forensic medicine practices and responsibilities. Methodology: A designed questionnaire for self-assessment was distributed purposely to selected senior forensic histopathology staff and forensic medicine consultants and senior specialists in the different forensic medicine centers in the Kingdom, in the midyear of 2015. Results: The questionnaire’s answers were analyzed. The study revealed great discrepancies in the response of physicians according to their own experience in the Kingdom. A detailed prescription of these results will be presented. Conclusion and Recommendations: Involvement of the histopathology’s staff in autopsy should be enhanced. The human resources are short and need to be improved too, both academically and practically. Preparation of a unified protocol is need. More recommendations will be revealed.

Keywords: forensic pathology, questionnaire, autopsy

Introduction

Forensic medicine services in our country is carried out by forensic medicine specialists. On the other hand, the microscopic examination is completely separated from the autopsy and the pathologist don’t attend the autopsy. Occasional attempts by the forensic medicine community to strengthen pathology training did not lead to effective results, the causes stem from both the forensic medicine and pathology communities. A survey form 15 questions was distributed to the forensic pathology in forensic medicine field. The forms were prepared to investigate the interest, knowledge and working system.

Results

Who should perform gross examination of the fresh organs (before fixation)?
- Most of the forensic medicine centers don’t have a specific international or local protocol in forensic medicine cases, every physician takes the samples according to his training background and the histopathologists don’t have the experience of sampling in forensic cases.

Do you have a protocol including specific/routine sampling from different organs according to international standards?
- The pathological don’t do photographic documentation for the medico-legal cases as a routine.

Which of the following stains are used in your forensic histopathology lab?
- In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, according to the Ministry of Health (MOH) Regulations, the forensic medical report should be in Arabic and the pathology final report must be translated too in Arabic and to be included in the final report. The histopathology report is issued in English in most of the centers and the forensic medical doctor translates it to write his final report.

Conclusion and Recommendations

1. There is a reasonable interest in forensic pathology by the forensic medicine specialist, while the time allocated for the histopathologist in forensic medicine rotation is relatively short (2 months), it is recommended to enhance the academic and practical training of the pathologist especially those interested in working in the forensic medicine field.
2. The human resources of forensic histopathologists in Saudi Arabia must be studied in depth to determine the forensic medicine centers’ real need of this expertise in the coming ten years.
3. Preparation and implementation of a unified protocol of sampling in forensic medicine cases (according to international standards), and it should be integrated in all forensic histopathology laboratories’ manual. Periodic evaluation of the new policies and procedures should be done as well.
4. Participation of the histopathologist in the autopsy should be encouraged especially the gross examination of fresh organs and sampling.
5. Improve the quality of the histopathological reporting and the staff should be enhanced academically and practically.

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