

RESPONSE TO LETTER TO THE EDITOR

RESPONSE TO LETTER TO THE EDITOR: THE ELUSIVE PATH TO VIRTUAL AUTOPSY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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Dear Editor,

I appreciate the thoughtful and detailed response from the author of the letter titled "The Elusive Path to Virtual Autopsy in Developing Countries," which raises pertinent questions and reflections on the challenges associated with implementing virtopsy technology, particularly in resource-constrained settings.

The letter highlights the discord between conventional dissection-based autopsies and the emerging, less invasive virtopsy approaches. This debate is longstanding, with strong opinions on both sides. While traditional autopsy remains the "gold standard" due to its established reliability and accessibility, virtopsy holds immense potential for enhancing forensic investigations, particularly in preserving the dignity of the deceased and providing non-invasive alternatives for next of kin^{1,2,3}.

The concern regarding the skill gap among pathologists in interpreting imaging data is valid. Postmortem imaging introduces challenges, such as artifacts, that can complicate interpretation. Therefore, structured and comprehensive training programs for forensic pathologists are critical, and these programs must be tailored to varying levels of experience. The development of hybrid models that combine traditional and virtual autopsies could bridge the gap during this transition, allowing the advantages of both methods to be utilized effectively^{2,4}.

As for the costs associated with setting up virtopsy centres, I concur that high initial investments and ongoing expenses related to software updates and maintenance can be significant barriers, particularly in developing countries. Prioritizing virtopsy in regions lacking even basic imaging modalities may seem incongruous. Many tertiary institutions in developing countries face infrastructural deficiencies, and addressing these fundamental needs should be paramount before venturing into postmortem imaging technologies⁵. Nevertheless, given the proper infrastructure and investments, virtopsy could become an essential complement to diagnostic tools in the future.

The ethical dimension of offering families a dignified alternative to traditional autopsy is particularly compelling. Although medico-legal autopsies may not require consent, your argument for offering more humane and less invasive alternatives to the decedent's families aligns with evolving perspectives on human rights. Integrating virtopsy as an option, where

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feasible, acknowledges the emotional and ethical considerations surrounding death and postmortem procedures.

Finally, I strongly support your call for global collaboration to make virtopsy technologies more accessible and less commercialized, particularly in lower-income regions. Technology transfer and knowledge sharing between nations could facilitate the adoption of virtopsy worldwide⁶. Virtopsy should not be a luxury reserved for high-income countries but rather an accessible tool that aligns with the evolving needs of forensic pathology globally.

In conclusion, the integration of virtopsy into forensic practice presents both challenges and opportunities. As we navigate this transition, it is essential to focus on training, infrastructure development, and ethical considerations. While virtopsy may not be feasible in all settings, it is a valuable tool worth pursuing through careful planning and international cooperation.

Thank you once again for your insightful contribution to this vital discussion.

Sincerely,

Herath JC, Herath UR
Authors of "Are invasive postmortem examinations still the 'gold standard' in diagnosing the cause of death?"

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

ETHICAL ISSUES

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