

# INVESTIGATING UNEXPECTED DEATH RESEARCH PROJECT

WORKSHOP REFLECTIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS



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## Workshop summary

On Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2022, a diverse group came together at the University of Leeds as part of Dr Jones' British Academy/Leverhulme funded project entitled 'Investigating Unexpected Death: Values and Attitudes in Coronial Autopsies'. Participants shared a range of interests and experience including, but not limited to, pathology/medicine, anatomical mortuary technology, coronial services, the legal profession, and bereavement services. At the end of the day, each participant shared their priority for change for the next 5 years. These can be found listed on the next page of this update.

*How do we continue to work together despite differing priorities and agendas?*

A key goal of the workshop was to establish a network of interested professionals, stakeholders, and academics. Doing this would lay the foundations for meaningful, impactful, research collaborations. The drive to work together comes from a belief that interdisciplinary work and expertise enriches the depth of findings and helps to ensure that policy development is embedded in a research-informed evidence base.



- 1.** Interdisciplinary/professional-academic, collaboration
- 2.** Valuing different perspectives
- 3.** Developing policy and changing practice

## Key Themes

During the workshop, several themes emerged. Reflecting on these may help us to establish priorities, identify intersections and develop future research plans.

- **Talking to the bereaved:** all professions and services engage with the bereaved (who are key stakeholders) but to varying degrees. Is there a need for more specialist roles, training, and expectation management? How do we balance the interests of the bereaved with those of other parties?
- **Models of death investigation:** would a move to regional centres improve consistency and quality? What impact would this have on the experience of the bereaved and would local workers accept the change? How would this be funded?
- **The public function of law:** some of these processes are visible but others are opaque and can lead to dissatisfaction due to misunderstanding. How important is story telling?
- **The value of medical knowledge:** are medicine and law always separate institutions? How could we better understand their reliance on each other and their impact on social and political experiences/agendas.

## Workshop participants' priorities for the next 5 years

In the box below, we see a consolidated list of the workshop participant's priorities for the next 5 years (and, in reality, beyond).

- *The APT industry needs protection afforded by regulation by state – this will provide a basis for standardisation and increase quality.*
- *Improvement in triage and scene decision making – this should address consistency, training and so on.*
- *Need to work on explaining the entire death investigation process to the bereaved.*
- *Need to work on explaining the need for an autopsy – utilising all services.*
- *Recognise danger in bereaved having to retell stories multiple times.*
- *Consistency regarding the levels of support for the bereaved available across different types/circumstances of death.*
- *Think about where invasive autopsies are really needed – for example, is there really a need where CoD is obvious or in some suicides? What interest does the state have in PM here? What are the 'right reasons' for autopsies?*
- *Improving the standards of the autopsies that are completed.*
- *Work on gaining ministerial responsibility for unexpected death investigation – this is the only way to stimulate meaningful political impetus for necessary reform.*
- *Move towards central hubs for autopsies and regional hubs for mortuaries: there is a need for a concentration of dedicated staff working together.*
- *Coroners should come under HMTCs – this would help with quality, consistency, accountability.*
- *Require pathologists to engage with the bereaved – this would improve empathy and outcomes for all.*
- *Move towards PMs being carried out on a sessional basis – with equal standards and recognition to other pathology specialisms, and improved resources for training.*
- *Create a national coroners service*
- *Join services back together – there are so many regulations and parties – they need to understand each other and be coherent.*
- *Purpose and accountability need to be addressed – boundaries, structure: do we tweak or have a blank sheet*
- *There is a need to recognise and value the work of the whole team – respect for all and their role.*

## What now?

The workshop was the beginning rather than end point. Imogen will create a mailing list of participants and others who would like to be part of this emerging network. Some points to consider:

- a) Do you know of anyone else who would like to be involved/feed into this network? If so, please do forward this and ask them to contact Imogen.
- b) After reflecting on the day, are there areas that you think are particularly important?
- c) What, if anything, would you like to contribute to potential future research?
- d) Some time ago I started a blog on the general topic of 'law and death'. For various workload related issues, I did not keep this up but plan to again. Would anyone like to contribute to it?

*I aim to provide an update every few months, including plans for future events. Please do keep in touch in the meantime – I am keen to hear any thoughts, reflections or plans. My email address is [i.jones2@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:i.jones2@leeds.ac.uk).*

