

-SAVE THE DATE-

THE DECLINE OF AUTOPSIES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CARE OF CRITICALLY ILL PATIENTS

London, 6 March 2015

Nuffield Council on Bioethics, 28 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3JS

On 6 March 2015, a unique, multi-stakeholder workshop entitled "*The decline of autopsies and implications for the care of critically ill patients*" will take place, organised by the European Critical Care Foundation in collaboration with Imperial College London, and generously hosted by the Nuffield Council on Bioethics.

Numerous scientific and academic articles have drawn attention to the decline of autopsy in recent years across Europe and beyond. The reasons for the decline are numerous and complex, ranging from changes in the attitudes of physicians and families, to economic, administrative and legal factors, to improved diagnostic techniques during lifetime. And yet despite advances in laboratory testing and medical imaging, discrepant findings persist between clinical diagnoses and autopsy results.

However understanding the exact cause of death remains important – important for families seeking closure on the death of a relative, important for doctors to improve clinical practices and important for public health officials responsible for organising care. It is of particular importance in critical care settings, where extensive technological interventions may mask physio-pathological conditions – or even generate new ones – thus creating new and more complicated causes of death.

Bringing together perspectives from across Europe in the fields of medicine, philosophy and public policy, the round-table meeting will aim to identify the factors driving the decline in autopsy procedures. Experts and practitioners will discuss whether the care of critically ill patients could benefit from an improvement in the number and quality of autopsies, whether traditional, minimally invasive or digital. We expect that the meeting will lead to the establishment of a working group and action plan that enables medical science to continue to learn from the information that autopsies can provide, and ultimately lead to improved patient outcomes.

The decline of autopsy is a perfect example where social, economic and cultural factors are almost invisibly shaping healthcare policy and practice, to the detriment of medical science, public health and future patients. Autopsy remains the ultimate quality control process in understanding cause of death and alternative processes are still imperfect. Informed debate on the value of autopsy is needed before its use is consigned to medical history.

Attendance by invitation only. For further information or to register your interest,
please contact Helen Brewer at h.brewer@euroccf.org
or tel: (+32) 496 285 664 at the European Critical Care Foundation.