

LIVING AUTOPSY



Living Autopsy event resources

This set of videos and accompanying written materials have been developed to help facilitate public events about autopsies by:

- Providing video(s) and written guidance to pathologists, science event organisers and others on how to run a Living Autopsy (or similar event) for public audiences
- Providing a recording of a Living Autopsy event presented by the creator of this event, Dr Suzy Lishman, for use in schools, universities, public lectures and science festivals.

The overall aim is to generate activities and events that communicate how post mortems help with training medical professionals to benefit the living with a wide audience.

In particular we would like pathologists to use the resources to run their own Living Autopsy event for **National Pathology Week**.

What is a Living Autopsy?

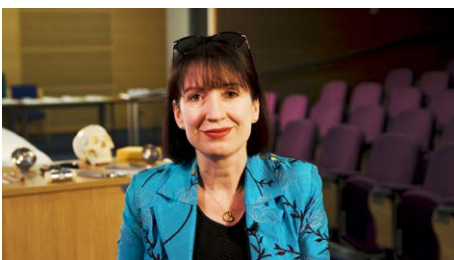
Originally known as a 'Virtual Autopsy' the event format this resource is based on was developed by consultant histopathologist, Dr Suzy Lishman.

It is a live audience-based event with one main pathologist presenter and a model playing a 'dead body'. It takes attendees through the process of a post mortem examination, and involves showing the real instruments used during the procedure. It also explains the role of pathologists in hospitals, and what circumstances would lead to a post mortem being required for someone who has died. This core content has been enhanced with additional themes, stories and visuals to bring in historical or other factors that are relevant to post mortems, disease and/or the venue or audience of the event.

This set of video resources provides all of the information you need on how to run the original 'non-themed' event, with some theme ideas from previous events provided as examples of how you could tailor it. In addition the how to videos give practical advice on organising and promoting your event, and some ideas on how to answer questions commonly asked by audience members.

The videos

The links to each of the six videos in this resource on the Living Autopsy resources page are the quickest and easiest way to find out what steps you need to take to set up your Living Autopsy event. They are all presented by Dr Suzy Lishman who has developed and delivered numerous Living Autopsy events around the UK.



Step by step guide to planning your event (see videos 2-4)

1. Decide on who, what, when, where and why:
 - a. Think about the audience you would like to reach and how this may affect the content you include
 - b. Consider theming your Living Autopsy so that it ties into a local festival or historical venue – venues such as castles and museums are worth investigating
 - c. Timing your event around an existing event or awareness week such as a science or community festival is likely to increase visibility and attendance
2. Find a dead body! This event is most effective if you find a volunteer to act as your 'dead body'. As they need to be stripped to the waist, you'll need to find a willing male friend or colleague. If you have funding for the event and are struggling to find a volunteer, you may want to consider hiring an actor or model. An agency used for this by the RCPATH public engagement team to try is <https://modelstudents.co.uk/>. Whoever you get as a dead body model, it is a good idea to remind them they are supposed to be dead so to lie as still as possible.
3. Think about extra props and demonstrations such as an organ dissection or skeleton to add drama to the event. You can also use the PowerPoint presentation that accompanies the videos (downloadable from the same page as this document), and some ideas from other relevant RCPATH resources including **Sometimes pathology is about the dead** and the **organ resource**.
4. Advertise your event – think about suitable promotional channels based on audience and venue. Most public venues will do the promotion and manage ticketing on your behalf. Use social media to engage people with the event before, during and after the event. Use #LivingAutopsy. If you're not a regular user of social media there are lots of useful guides online including those made by the **National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement**, and the **NHS**.
5. Do your preparation – read up about the theme and/or venue you've chosen and gather a few statistics for your talk.
6. Use the **RCPATH resources** to get ideas and extra support, and request **branded promotional materials** for your event; these are always really popular. You might also consider applying for funding for your event from the RCPATH Public Engagement Innovation Grant Scheme, which offers grants of up to £1000 for pathology-related public engagement projects; the scheme runs annually.
7. Use prompt cards while you're delivering the lecture; these can be placed on the table next to the model playing the dead body or next to the instruments and be a useful reminder for things like key dates and statistics related to post mortems and/or the history of the venue. You may not look at them but it's helpful to have them there just in case!
8. Give a health warning before you start the event. Warn audience members that although there is no real blood or dead body, they may still find the descriptions of an autopsy can make them feel unwell. Ask audience members to step outside and/or contact a member of venue staff if they feel unwell. Be alert to swaying or fainting audience members.
9. Make your Living Autopsy event as interactive as possible. With small audiences you can hand round the post mortem instruments before, during or after the event. With larger audiences you can make it interactive by asking a few questions (e.g. who knows what this instrument is used for?) and/or asking for a show of hands etc.

10. Keep your Living Autopsy event respectful and dignified, and be sensitive to the feelings of audience members who may have had a loved one undergo a post mortem.
11. Remember to mention your colleagues who work with you in the Post Mortem Room, particularly Anatomical Pathology Technologists; consider doing the event as a 'double-act' with a local APT. Find ways of mentioning the other pathology specialties wherever you can, to highlight the breadth and diversity of pathology and expertise amongst different pathologists.
12. Leave time in the event schedule for setting up and for audience questions. Below is a possible event schedule you could use as a guide. Plant a couple of questions with friends or colleagues in the audience in case people are too shy to put their hand up.
13. Evaluate your event – you can use printed postcards, an online survey on iPads at the event, or an online survey via email after the event. The [RCPATH resources page](#) has lots of templates for evaluation questionnaires and other tools. There is also very useful guidance on evaluating public engagement activities on the [NCCPE website](#).

Possible timings/ schedule for a Living Autopsy event

- 16:00 – 17:00 : Set up venue, brief model
- 17:00 – 17:30 : Audience arrive
(Option to serve refreshments between 17:00 – 17:30)
- 17:30 – 19:00 : Living Autopsy lecture/demo delivered
- 19:00 – 19:30 : Questions, final thanks
(Option to serve wine/ other refreshments after the event to allow for additional discussions)

Checklist of equipment needed for Living Autopsy event

1. Two tables or benches/examination couch
2. Two white table cloths or flat white bed sheets
3. Post mortem instruments:
 - a. Scalpel – for fine cutting
 - b. Large knife (PM40) – for large cutting
 - c. Forceps – for gripping tissue
 - d. Ladles – for removing and measuring bodily fluids
 - e. Specially-adapted scissors (enterotome) – for opening the bowel
 - f. Specialised shears – for cutting the ribs
 - g. Hammer and chisel – for removing the skull to examine the brain
 - h. Saw – for opening the skull to examine the brain
 - i. Marker pens – for indicating the site of incisions and organs
 - j. Sponge
 - k. Cassettes
 - l. Laptop, projector and screen (optional)
 - m. Lapel microphone for main speaker in larger venues and hand-held microphones for questions
 - n. Evaluation postcards or electronic device loaded with online survey for collecting feedback
 - o. Water for main speaker
 - p. RCPATH promotional materials/other giveaways