

## RESEARCH INVOLVING MATERIAL FROM CORONERS' AUTOPSIES

### *Advice to ethics committees and researchers*

Research involving **access to coronial material** must be referred to the **Queensland Health Forensic and Scientific Services Human Ethics Committee (FSS-HEC)** for ethical and legal approvals. This also applies to clinical research projects where there is a component involving coronial material. In this context examples of coronial material include tissues from coronial autopsies, slides and blocks, blood samples, autopsy reports and other documents and data relating to coronial autopsies.

The use of material from coronial autopsies for research requires the approval of the State Coroner. If the research involves access to **coronial documents** approval as a "genuine researcher" under s.53 of the *Coroners Act 2003* is also required. These approvals are subject to review by an ethics committee whose membership includes representatives of the State Coroner.

The FSS-HEC is an NHMRC constituted ethics committee with expertise in reviewing a wide range of issues relating to autopsies and the coronial system. The FSS-HEC has established processes, in consultation with the Office of State Coroner, to facilitate the approvals needed to undertake research in the coronial environment.

Queensland Health (QH) pathologists undertake autopsies to assist in determining the cause of death in cases referred to the Coroner. Data, autopsy reports and other coronial documents relating to these cases are kept in the Forensic module of AUSLAB (the QH clinical and scientific information system).

Although the information in Forensic AUSLAB is held by QH all information and documents relating to coroners' cases "belongs" to the coroner and cannot be used for purposes other than the coronial process without approval. Forensic AUSLAB is separated from clinical AUSLAB by a firewall. Clinical AUSLAB logins cannot be used to access this information.

Requests for **Forensic AUSLAB access for research purposes** require the endorsement of the Chief Forensic Pathologist and must be submitted through the Secretary of the FSS-HEC. Access to Forensic AUSLAB will require:

- approval by an appropriate ethics committee;
- authorisation from the State Coroner;
- approval as a "genuine researcher" under s.53 of the Act if access to coronial documents is required.

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