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How to become a medical examiner in canada

Every day someone passes away leaving family members wondering what caused their death. Because of the knowledge and dedication of autopsy technicians, loved ones usually get their answers. This career can be stressful but can also be very challenging and exciting, especially for someone who is not squeamish or bothered by bodily parts and fluids. Learn what it takes to become an autopsy technician as well as a little about the career working as part of the crime scene investigation team. What is an Autopsy Technician? An autopsy technician is a trained professional who works alongside pathologists, morticians or medical examiners. They help take care of deceased bodies to prepare them for burial or cremation. They also assist in performing many tests and examinations to determine the cause of death or for evidence in criminal cases. Autopsy technicians must be highly trained and educated to be able to complete the many duties of which they're assigned. Individuals who have an interest in human anatomy and an interest in learning more about the causes of death are often the ones who chose to become autopsy technicians. Career Outlook The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) lists autopsy technicians in the category of forensic science technicians. According to the bureau, these professionals are expected to see an employment growth of 17% between 2016 and 2026, which should result in about 2,600 new jobs created by 2026. Autopsy technicians generally work in medical examiners' offices or in hospitals. Some may also apply to work in law enforcement. Salary for Autopsy Technicians According to a 2017 BLS report, forensic science technicians earned wages that ranged from about \$33,880 to \$95,600 or more with the average annual wage at \$61,220 and the hourly wage at \$29.43. Various factors can affect their wages, including experience, training, employer or geographic location. Below is an example of how wages can fluctuate from one state to the next. This is a list of the five highest-paying states for forensic science technicians followed by the five lowest-paying states. As you can see, there is a substantial difference (more than \$40,000) in what these technicians earn in California and what is earned in Arkansas. California - \$82,650 Illinois - \$79,630 Nevada - \$76,160 Massachusetts - \$75,570 Connecticut - \$74,560 Arkansas - \$39,830 New Mexico - \$40,480 North Dakota - \$42,240 Kentucky - \$44,490 Maine - \$46,930 How to Become an Autopsy Technician To become an autopsy technician requires education and training. The individual must have a high school diploma to work in any autopsy positions. They should also have a solid background in chemistry, anatomy and biology. Most autopsy technicians have at least a bachelor's degree in forensic science, biology or mortuary science, which takes four years to complete. Completing an associate's degree program may be adequate for an entry-level position, but a bachelor's degree is the most common choice for this position. Post-bachelor's work experience Once the candidate has earned the bachelor's degree, he or she can generally seek employment and obtain some work experience. Another alternative is completing an internship, which provides the candidate with hands-on training. Some autopsy technicians wish to advance their careers and pursue a master's degree. The most common educational program for these individuals is a pathology assistant graduate program. Forensic autopsy technicians must be well aware of departmental procedures and policies, including quality improvement, infection control standards, environmental standards and safety issues. They must also have a solid knowledge of the following. Photographs and x-rays Laboratory procedures Modern pathological, forensic and lab practices and principles Universal safety and precautions guidelines Legal requirements relevant to medical examiners Anatomy and medical nomenclature Physical requirements Autopsy technicians must be physically able to lift and move bodies of various sizes. They must also have good judgment and knowledge to evaluate situations, assess alternative methods and make possible recommendations. They must also have a solid understanding of technical instructions and materials. Although they work alongside pathologists or forensic scientists, they must also be able to work efficiently and independently if necessary. Day in the Life of an Autopsy Technician Autopsy technicians assist coroners, medical examiners or forensic pathologists in working on deceased bodies. They generally work a 9-5 schedule during the week but may also be called into work in the evenings, on weekends or holidays if they're needed. This is often the case when working with law enforcement, and the information is needed as soon as possible. In cases like this, the autopsy technician may be called into work after hours will be required to stay until they can provide law enforcement with the information they need. Autopsy technicians have many duties throughout their workday both on their own and working alongside pathologists. Some of their duties include: Preparing autopsy room Lifting and moving bodies Providing containers for specimen collection Collecting toxicology samples Documenting notes on patient's clinical history Weighing and eviscerating organs Applying sutures to body Opening and closing bodies Performing diagnostic imaging and dental x-rays Assisting pathologist with different parts of the exam Positioning and photographing the bodies Releasing bodies to mortician Collecting fingerprints Preserving and preparing evidence Collecting and preserving physical and biological evidence, including clothing Perform clerical work as needed There are very few parts of the autopsy process that the autopsy technician does not perform from the moment the body arrives right up until it is released to the funeral home. Much of the experience the technician obtains can be used when applying for an advanced position. Some also choose to advance their education and pursue master's degrees, and the experience is extremely beneficial to these students. Licensure, Certification and Continuing Education Autopsy technicians are not required to be licensed or certified, but many choose to obtain certification to enhance their resumes and improve their career opportunities. Certification can demonstrate the individual's knowledge and commitment to the field. Candidates can obtain certification through the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI). To earn the certification, the candidate must pass a 240 multiple-choice certification exam. To be eligible to sit for the exam, the applicant must meet the following requirements. Be at least 18 years old Have a high school diploma or equivalent Be employed in a Coroner or Medical Examiner office and have the duties of supervising or conducting death scene investigations Have at least 640 hours of experience in death investigations Once the candidate successfully passes the exam, he or she has earned the title of Diplomate of the ABMDI and is given a certificate with a certification number that can be given to potential employers. In order to maintain certification, the autopsy technician must be a current ABMDI member in good standing, demonstrate knowledge of the Code of Ethics in writing and show proof of 45 hours of continuing education. Sources: American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators Most Canadian's die of natural causes - cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, Alzheimer's disease - to name a few. The timing of these deaths is usually unsurprising, and rarely warrants further investigation to allow the loved one of those affected to have closure. In instances of accident, homicide, suicide, or when a cause of death cannot be easily determined, the circumstances surrounding the death may warrant expert opinion. This information is important to families, the justice system, public health, and future health care planning. From 2006 to 2017, 14 per cent of deaths that occurred in Canada were investigated by a coroner or medical examiner. Over the last few decades, the 'autopsy' - the examination of a body by a pathologist to evaluate disease and injury - has become less common. Approximately six per cent of all deaths in Canada lead to an autopsy, a number that was closer to 13 per cent in the early 1990s. The dissection itself combined with the additional testing done on tissue can become a fairly expensive endeavour. As our understanding of normal disease timelines has improved, the decline in the number of autopsies numbers is unlikely a major issue. The problem with death investigation in Canada lies more in the resources allocated to the cases that are investigated. One might wonder: How is cause of death determined, and why should we invest millions of dollars in the process? In Canada, there is no overarching federal authority over death investigation. Death investigation is the responsibility of each province and follows either the coroner's system or the medical examiner's system. In a medical examiner system, like in Alberta, all suspicious deaths are investigated by a medical examiner who is a trained forensic pathologist. Medical examiners review the deceased person's medical information and the circumstances around the death, complete autopsies, and synthesize all of this information into their opinion on cause of death. In the coroner's system, a coroner is assigned to oversee death investigations and decides on the additional testing required before formulating an opinion as to an individual's cause of death. In Ontario, coroners are required to be physicians, usually general practitioners, and work closely with local forensics units to further delineate an individual's cause of death. In BC, coroners in charge of death investigation are not required to have formal medical training but they decide whether an autopsy by a pathologist is necessary. Ultimately, coroners make conclusions about cause of death based on the best information available to them. Given the lack of formal medical training, it is difficult to be confident that the accuracy of these conclusions will always be sound. And accurate information surrounding death has important implications for the living. Many death investigation systems in Canada have had a tumultuous relationship with provincial governments and issues with adequate staffing and funding. In 2011, all of Calgary's medical examiners resigned, and the same office saw four out of five medical examiners resign in 2018. In Ontario, the Hamilton General Hospital forensic unit has been shut down as of July 2019 with cases being transferred to Toronto, despite being the second busiest of seven facilities in the province. The Canadian public deserves better. In a tight fiscal climate, it is not surprising that it is hard to convince governments to invest in death investigation infrastructure. The reality is that the number of deaths requiring investigation is relatively low. While the upfront costs of updating morgues and investing in a handful of forensics experts for each province is high, it is a worthy investment with implications for families and the living. Ontario has taken some steps in the right direction - the 2008 Goudge inquiry examined the system for forensic pathology in Ontario as a whole and identified a number of systemic problems, including incorrect determinations of causes of death in serious legal cases. Since then, systemic changes, including a new centre for forensic science in Toronto and the appointment of several forensic pathologists as coroners, are underway. When will other provinces step up? *A version of this opinion was first published in the Vancouver Sun

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