

Cutting-Edge Autopsies

Australian pathologist a pioneer in mortuary based CT scanning

Australasia's peak medical diagnostic body, the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia (RCPA), says the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (VIFM) is at the forefront of pioneering one of forensic pathology's biggest changes in autopsy procedures.

It is one of the only forensic medical departments around the world, in addition to the US military, that automatically scans every body that comes into the centre with a "computed tomography scanner", or CT scanner.

Since 2006, when the procedure was implemented as a 'trial strategy' for disaster planning for the Commonwealth Games, the VIFM has made the CT scan part of day to day operational procedures, and has compiled a database of forensic information that is of interest around the world.

RCPA Victorian State Councilor, and Deputy Director of the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine, Dr David Ranson, says the procedure of scanning as an automatic part of forensic death investigation has many pluses.

"Similarly to a clinician's approach for each patient, the CT scan is like taking a medical history", says Dr Ranson.

"It allows the forensic pathologist to plan the autopsy in an informed manner – often protecting the pathologist from unknown occupational health and safety issues – and provides quality information, often indicating the possible cause of death.

"Mortuary-based CT scanning should, and will, become inevitably become part of standard practice. It offers a higher standard in death investigation.

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