

## Guidelines for autopsy investigation of sudden cardiac death

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Cardiovascular Pathology

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**Abstract** Although sudden cardiac death is one of the most important mode of death in Western Countries, pathologists and public health physicians have not given this problem the attention it deserves. New methods of preventing potentially fatal arrhythmias have been developed, and the accurate diagnosis of the causes of sudden cardiac death is now of particular importance. Pathologists are responsible for determining the precise cause of sudden death but there is considerable variation in the way in which they approach this increasingly complex task. The Association for European Cardiovascular Pathology developed guidelines, which represent the minimum standard that is required in the routine autopsy practice for the adequate assessment of sudden cardiac death, including not only a protocol for heart examination and histological sampling, but also for toxicology and molecular investigation. Our recommendations apply to university medical centres, regional and district hospitals and all types of forensic

medicine institutes. If a uniform method of investigation is adopted throughout the European Union, this will lead to improvements in standards of practice, allow meaningful comparisons between different communities and regions and, most importantly, permit future trends in the patterns of disease causing sudden death to be monitored.

**Key words:** Autopsy – Guidelines – Protocol – Sudden cardiac death

### Introduction

Sudden cardiac death (SCD) is the leading mode of death in all communities of the United States and of the European Union, but its precise incidence is unknown. Internationally

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\*<http://anpat.unipd.it/aecvp/>

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