Deaths in Custody: The “Second Look” Autopsy.
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By the end of the presentation, participants will be able to:

1. State the risks and benefits of conducting a “Second Look Autopsy”.
2. Recall the components of the “Second Look Autopsy”.
3. Discuss the risks and benefits of release of the results and findings of the “Second Look Autopsy”.

The terms “Justice is Blind” and “Innocent until Proven Guilty” are phrases which are sometimes not applicable to segments of the population in the United States of America. The unequal application of justice is no different than the unequal access to healthcare and decent housing in this country.

Obtaining a second opinion on a certified cause and manner of death is akin to obtaining a second opinion on a diagnosis, recommended course of treatment or prognosis in clinical medicine. However, obtaining a second opinion in death investigation cases is much more difficult than in medical care.

Conducting a second autopsy in cases of deaths in custody is made difficult as it can represent a threat to the status quo, the possibility of a contradictory opinion being offered on the certified cause and manner of death which can question the actions of the participants involved in the fatal incident from both the criminal and civil litigation perspectives.

The medical professional who determines and certifies cause and manner of death wields a significant amount of power. For a forensic pathologist and expert witness who is a member of a minority ethnic group in the USA, the stakes of making those two determinations can be much higher than for other medical disciplines.

This presentation will share the presenter’s experience of performing second autopsies over a 32 years-period. It will highlight her role in the postmortem examination process and the challenges faced in attempting to protect one’s professional career, promoting equality in thorough medicolegal death investigation and the certification of cause and manner of death in a highly controversial area of forensic pathology.