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In Reply

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We have read the comments from Drs. Parkash and Smith regarding our recently published letter to the editor. We never conceived our letter as a formal epidemiological study.¹ Instead, we were sending a dispatch from the front lines of autopsy work during the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic. We do not consider exposure in the general population equivalent to exposure in morgue workers during an autopsy; we were simply providing a simple comparison to help a reader understand that the risk of a properly protected morgue worker contracting COVID-19 from autopsy is slight. We agree with the authors that autopsy is an essential component of understanding this new disease. We continue to advocate for the value of autopsy in elucidating the pathobiology of COVID-19, ensuring accurate public health information for managing the pandemic, and procuring and preserving important specimens for research to learn more about COVID-19. The only way to realize these three benefits of autopsy is to perform autopsies. We sent our letter to reduce confusion in a time of uncertainty and to encourage appropriately cautious autopsy pathologists to engage in their important work on patients that died with COVID-19 infection – providing that the pathologists and their staff have the necessary facility, equipment, supervision, and experience to safely and effectively conduct such autopsies. The pathologists involved in this autopsy work at academic centers should include residents in training. As tomorrow's pathologists will be expected to help manage the next infectious disease pandemic, it is imperative that today's pathology residents engage in all aspects of their institution's response to COVID-19, including participating in the performance of autopsies when they are conducted.²

Reference

1. Davis GG, Williamson AK. Risk of COVID-19 Transmission During Autopsy [Published online ahead of print, June 10, 2020]. *Arch Pathol Lab Med*. doi: 10.5858/arpa.2020-0345-LE.
2. College of American Pathologists. Amended Covid-19 autopsy guideline statement from the CAP Autopsy Committee. CAP Web site. <https://documents.cap.org/documents/COVID-Autopsy-Statement-05may2020.pdf>. Accessed August 13, 2020.