

Police is blamed for selling the unidentified dead bodies to medical colleges and medical students for their experiments. Dead bodies have overburdened the only morgue in the city as police delays the completion of their papers and doctors in the mortuary cannot touch the body without these legal notes. Mona Zia reports on the city morgue

Life, no doubt, is the greatest bliss on the earth and one seldom wishes to lose it. But death defies the doctors and every living soul has to pass as it has been and is and will be a rule forever.

Dead souls deserve, if not a very prestigious handling of them, then even a nice and decent burial in this so-called humane and civilised world of the 21st century. But remorsefully enough, dead bodies lying on the footpaths or in the middle of some road after a horrifying accident, invite our attention to what happens to the unidentified dead bodies in a highly business-minded and materialistic society like ours.

In the living world, we fight for our rights and flare-up on every step on the violation of these rights. We have special human rights organisations in our society. But what about those who leave the world of flesh and we take them as dead ignoring that he still exists as the remains of an individual in the society. We as human beings have certain moral and ethical responsibilities towards his or her remains. They should be buried according to their religion and culture as soon as possible. There is one exception



religion and culture as soon as possible. There is one exception to this, which flashed when we visited the mortuary of Mayo Hospital Lahore.

When a person dies in suspicious circumstances, he or she becomes the property of the state. These suspicious circumstances can be an accident, suicide or homicide. The bodies of these people are supposed to get postmortemmed before the burial according to the state law. They are brought to the morgue by the police of the concerned area.

First of all the body is registered with the registration room at the reception of the morgue and if there are any surgical or medico-legal notes with the body they are handed over to the concerned doctor. Body is transferred to the freezers or immediately postmortemmed depending upon the circumstances. If it is a bomb blast case or any road accident with the documents available, with body, the postmortem is performed immediately. Otherwise the body is transferred to the freezers. Sometimes a body is found after

a few days of the death and then the putifying process gets started. In such cases the police should complete the documents immediately because the body starts stinking. This situation becomes even worse in summer season when due to hot weather decomposition process is triggered, so it should be disposed off as soon as possible.

It has been mentioned in the form available at the reception or the registration counter of the dead bodies that police is bound to complete the documents within three days in normal cases but under special cases these should be completed within 24 hours.

General public blames doctors for delay in the postmortem report, but it has been mentioned in the rules that no doctor is allowed to touch the body without the completion of

police documents. And unfortunately there are many scandals about the police that they create many hindrances in the process and use it as a means to earn money. A well off person faces lesser problems than a person with lower social status.

A few months ago a burnt female case was brought to the mortuary. After the completion of the postmortem procedure police did not return the body to her husband and was reportedly demanding a sum of rupees 500, but the poor man was reluctant to pay because he hardly had the money for taking her back to the village and her burial. Fortunately somebody from the same department helped him and that policeman was dismissed in the end. — Remember it was a rare case!

Talking to Dr Akmal Shaheen

in the mortuary as to why do doctors hesitate in coming over here he said, "We do not enjoy that social status which another doctor does, and we are still getting rupees 10 per postmortem according to 1938 Law which is equal to nothing."

Mayo Hospital Morgue is the only morgue in the whole district, which is always overloaded, the other poor aspect is that there are no proper forensic surgeons in the mortuary. On the other hand in Balochistan every district has its own forensic surgeon. According to a saying "Eyes cannot see when mind does not know". People like surgeons and physicians cannot depend on guesses and intuition. And when it the matter of "To be" or "Not to be", they have forensic medicine as their guide.

William Boyd writes in his

book "Text Book of Pathology" "Forensic medicine is a part of medical education though sometimes it is included in the regular curriculum and some times not. Nevertheless, it is necessary for a physician or surgeon to have a good working idea of it. It is good to study it carefully for it's day to day application. Knowledge of Forensic medicine is useful when a physician writes a certificate with legal implications. People often request the physicians for special consideration but the physicians must be aware of pitfalls."

Doctors are over-worked and sometimes they have to give more postmortem reports than normal, in special cases like bomb blasts and road accidents. There is a need to increase the number of doctors.

Three cavities of the body are opened during post mortem i.e the skull, the thorax region and the abdominal regional and if it is a gun shot case, the placement of the bullet is identified before the postmortem through X-ray. In foreign countries there are special artists for this job but unfortunately here in Pakistan this job is performed by uneducated people who take it very casually and do not understand the seriousness of the matter.

Then the doctor checks the body to know the cause of death, because sometimes it happens that the cause of death which is apparent is not the actual cause. A person may be poisoned before gun shot or a person can also die because of heart attack before the gun shot due to the fear. The whole case

Dead people do tell a tale

bodies, but they are justified to

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of the crime can be changed if the doctor's report is not conducted on careful observations. The doctor mentions in his report the

1. cause of death
2. time between death and postmortem
3. time between injury and death
4. any three identification marks on the body.

Doctor then hand overs the autopsy report to the investigative officer and makes the final report keeping in view all the facts.

Mayo Hospital Mortuary is the only mortuary in Asia which has all the facilities available under one roof. It has laboratories for all the chemical analysis but they are not

authorised to perform the test. They send their specimens for analysis to Birdwood Road. This is one of the reason in the delay of postmortem report. Government should make this department independent to to make the process easier.

All the doctors we came across in the mortuary said that

some extent for not taking over the charge because of less funds.

Talking to the incharge he said "We have given the government a proposal that the female postmortems should be performed in Fatima Jinnah Hospital, but they have not responded yet!"

The condition of this mortuary can be made better by giving more facilities to the doctors and by providing full equipment to the doctors, because they are not provided with special masks, and some of them are allergic to the dead bodies and get skin diseases. This is one of the major reasons that doctors hesitate. Number of doctors should be increased, and their duties must keep on changing. There should be a check on police to make sure they complete the documents in time

Relatives of the dead people are already in miserable condition due to the loss of their dear ones so they should be facing minimum complications in morgue.