

Post Mortem Examination of the Dog or Cat - a possible procedure

Consider all relevant clinical information before proceeding (Radiology, Ultrasonography, Clinical chemistry etc.). Make notes of any abnormality during the examination.

External examination

- Examine the skin, mucous membranes, mouth, teeth, eyes, ears and external genitalia.
- Eyes should be removed, fixed and submitted whole without dissection; a pathologist will then section the fixed eye to give an anatomically intact section before processing.

With the carcass in dorsal recumbency, incise the skin from symphysis of the mandible to the pubis along the midline, dissect and reflect the skin back and disarticulate the limbs if necessary. Open the abdominal cavity by a midline incision.

Abdominal examination

- Collect, measure and examine any abnormal peritoneal fluid.
- Examine all of the abdominal content whilst in situ and record any abnormalities of appearance and position.
- Locate and examine the kidneys and adrenal glands whilst the viscera are still in situ.
- Puncture the diaphragm and note negative pressure. The abdominal contents can be removed and examined at this stage or left until after examination of the thorax
- Transect the rectum in the pelvis and oesophagus at the diaphragm. Using traction remove the whole of the intestinal tract.
- Examine the mesenteric lymph nodes.
- Open and examine the stomach (along the lesser curvature), duodenum, jejunum, ileum, colon. Examine the contents and mucosa. Check the patency of the bile duct by applying pressure to the gall bladder.

- Examine the liver and gall bladder. Make notes of any abnormalities on the serosal surface and cut surface of the liver. Examine the contents and lining of the gall bladder.
- Examine the pancreas. Serosal surface and the surface of serial sections.
- Examine the spleen. Serosal surface and the surface of serial sections.

Examine the kidneys and urogenital tract in situ.

- Check the patency of the urethra. Remove and examine the entire urogenital tract.
- Kidney examination: Transect and remove the capsule. Compare right and left kidneys.
- Examine the ovaries, uterus, cervix and vagina in the female and examine the testes, epididymis, prostate and penis of males.

Thoracic, cervical and oral examination.

- Remove the sternum by cutting along the costo-chondral junction on both sides.
- Examine the contents of the thorax in situ and note any abnormalities or organs and vessels. Collect and examine any abnormal fluid within the pleural cavity.
- Dissect between the mandible and tongue on either side and withdraw the tongue ventrally through the incision.
- Dissect either side of the larynx, cutting through the hyoid bone and down the neck either side of the oesophagus and trachea.
- Remove the tongue, larynx, oesophagus and trachea in one piece along with the contents of the thoracic cavity.
- Examine the pluck in detail.
- Respiratory tract. Palpate and visually examine the larynx, trachea, lungs. Identify the thyroid glands, parathyroids and note any changes in the lymph nodes. Cut along the dorsal trachea and into each bronchus; examine the surfaces and any contents.
- Examine the pericardial sac externally and internally. Collect and examine any abnormal fluid within the pericardial sac. Examine the surface of the heart. Cut the heart open and examine the myocardium, chambers and valves (valve flaps and chordae tendinae) following the flow of blood. Check for evidence of the ductus arteriosus.
- The oesophagus can be opened and examined at this stage.

Examine the musculoskeletal system:

- Check for muscle masses, ligaments, joints and bones.

If in any doubt, please feel free to contact one of our pathologists on 01379 854180 for advice.