Necropsy Guide for Dogs, Cats, and Small Mammals
This book is dedicated to John M. King, who wrote The Necropsy Book, and taught us all about the art of the necropsy.
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Necropsies are not performed for a variety of reasons. The death of a companion animal is always an emotional time and broaching the subject of a necropsy may seem insensitive. However, input from the clinicians at the Cornell University Hospital for Animals suggests that if owners believe something positive can come from the death of their pet, especially knowledge that could potentially help other animals, they are much more likely to consent to a postmortem examination. Also, many veterinarians, especially at tertiary care facilities, share the belief of physicians that the advent of newer diagnostic techniques and powerful imaging modalities makes the necropsy or autopsy obsolete. However, despite the advances in medical technology, the rate of diagnostic errors remains high. Up to 10% of autopsies reveal a misdiagnosis that would likely have affected patient outcome and the cause of death is misdiagnosed in almost 25% of cases. Our personal experience with necropsies reveals similar percentages of misdiagnoses in veterinary medicine.

The goal of this book is to provide veterinary students and small animal practitioners, as well as pathology residents and pathologists, a guide for performing a necropsy, including a step-by-step tutorial of the basic necropsy procedure, a review of the anatomy and dissection techniques for each organ system, and information on collecting tissues for additional testing. We hope more veterinarians will take advantage of the unique continuing educational opportunity the necropsy affords them.

Foreword

“Internists know everything and do nothing; Surgeons know nothing and do everything; Pathologists know everything and do everything, but it’s too late.”

This saying is popular among veterinary and medical students and reflects some common stereotypes about the different disciplines in our professions. We will let the internists and surgeons speak for themselves, but as pathologists, we like to think that our knowledge base is equivalent to an internist and our technical skills rival those of a surgeon. And we concede that our efforts are not going to help the patient on the necropsy table; however, the work of the pathologist is not too late to make a big impact. A necropsy examination is a simple, cost-effective, broad spectrum diagnostic procedure that requires no advanced training or high priced equipment and can provide information beneficial to the animal’s family and veterinary team, as well our overall understanding of disease processes (animal and human), which could potentially save other lives.

Despite the benefits of a necropsy, this procedure is rarely performed, and often not even considered. Here at Cornell, only a small percentage of the animals that die or are euthanized in the small animal hospital are submitted for necropsy. In human medicine, the autopsy rate has drastically declined over the past few decades. Before the 1970s, 30–40% of all human hospital deaths were investigated by autopsy but by 2005, the rate had fallen to less than 10%, with almost no autopsies performed at hospitals that are not affiliated with an academic institution.
Acknowledgments

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About the Companion Website

This book is accompanied by a companion website:

www.wiley.com/go/mcdonough/necropsy

The website includes:

- Video of necropsy being performed.