

Changes to legal forensic inspections in Sicily during Covid-19

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Our institute, in collaboration with the Public Prosecutor's Office, arranges for cadaveric inspections during a judicial inspection, jointly with the police.

With the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, operating methods have changed.

Specifically, we now discuss the cases individually before attending to guarantee the health of operators and citizens.¹

Before each access to the crime scene, we collect as much information as possible in order to minimise the risk of exposure and then we proceed as per common protocols.

From March to today (17 April 2020), we have had fewer requests to inspect where deaths have occurred in people's homes or similar. Where there are no suggestive elements of crime, it is more appropriate to bag up the body on the basis that the person died of unknown natural causes, and should therefore be treated as a "suspect case".

In the case of non-traumatic deaths, we have worked together with our public health department to carry out the Covid-19 screening buffer on a corpse before they are moved. Traumatic death cases require greater urgency as swabs are needed sooner; so, equipped with personal protective equipment, like the doctors who work in the Covid departments, we go on site.

The situation is more complex and drawn out when deaths occur in healthcare, hospital and residential facilities, especially if reports have been received from family members. In these cases, it is imperative to carefully observe the body to ensure that any harmful sign present is attributable to suitable health procedures and also to carefully check the documentation. Given the mortuary rooms provided, it is easier to screen for Covid-19 before handling a corpse.³

In Italy, the Prosecutor's Office is currently focusing a lot of attention on care and nursing homes, previously known to us for personal injury episodes, but today for Covid-19 outbreaks which were probably imported there.

It is inevitable that the way we do our work will change but given the delicacy and importance of the first observation of the corpse, we need to minimise the risk that can result from biological exposure and ensure the safety of the public utility service.

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