Letter to Editor: Response

Post mortem changes and clothing

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Dear Editor,

We are writing to answer the enquiry from Professor Somsri Wiwanitkit and Professor Viroj Wiwanitkit about the findings of our study.

We could not agree more that clothing does play an important role in affecting the post mortem changes of corpses. One of the major effects include retaining body heat right after death (in other words, algor mortis), which in turn will enhance faster onset of putrefaction. Another influence is the retention of moisture released from destruction of soft tissue with/without presence of arthropods, which will favour formation of adipocere.

However, there are too many variety of fabrics that is present in the current market. Fabrics may be found originally on the deceased as parts of his/her attire or could be used as additional covering in order to avoid or delay the detection of the corpse. It is undeniable that each of them has its own heat retention (in affecting algor mortis) and moisture retention/adsorption properties (in determining formation of adipocere). Therefore we only included 2 types of clothing in this study, i.e. light clothing (cotton T-shirt and short pants) and thick clothing (cotton long sleeve shirt, long pants, stockings and jacket).

Our study showed that the presence of clothing will cause a difference in macroscopic postmortem changes although the difference is not statistically significant when the development of Total Body Score is compared between light and heavy clothing. This is due to the various available access points in both types of clothing especially around the face and neck area, which allow oviposition of Dipteran and infestation of larvae.

In terms of temperature, the focus of the research was in buried carcasses reflecting the buried remains in real forensic context. From the temperature data we collected in the study, the temperature in the grave does not fluctuate as much as ambient temperature, and it is lower when compared to ambient temperature as well. Therefore this could have attributed to a certain extent, to the slower rate of decomposition for bodies in shallow graves.

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