

## Authors' Response

Sir,

We thank Dr. Zamani for her comments regarding our study on the role of histology in hanging suicides (1,2). One of the significant deficiencies in forensic pathology over the years has been failure to use an evidence-based approach. Histology is an excellent example of this. Recently, a debate was published on the role of histology involving seven senior forensic experts from six countries replying to a Commentary (3). Interestingly, no consensus could be achieved, although the individual authors presented their positions clearly. Thus, the issue of the role of histology in forensic autopsies is far from resolved. One of the mistakes that forensic pathologists can make is to uncritically accept the statements in text books, no matter how excellent the book may be. A good example of this involves the macroscopic aging of bruises: Although it is well recognized to be inaccurate, many texts persist in providing very precise time lines. In answer to Dr. Zamani's question "What made the authors believe this approach to be necessary to be evaluated in such a research?" we would reply: to provide an evidence-based analysis to enable informed decision making, rather than merely perpetuating text book assertions. Could we ask on what scientific basis Dr. Zamani has not been undertaking histology? While Shkrum and Ramsay (4) state that a medical examiner or coroner may limit the postmortem to an external examination only, this is far from "declaring" that internal or histological examinations are unnecessary in suicidal hangings. Instead what they clearly say on page 10 of their text when referring to external examination only is that "Certain types of cases (e.g., suicidal hanging, massive trauma) may be suitable for this type of examination"

(4, underlining inserted)—a position that we would agree with. As the studies to which they refer cover a wide range of causes of traumatic death, it is not correct to suggest that they leave the question of internal examination, or the use of histology, in cases of suicidal hanging either clear-cut or settled. The only way for forensic pathology and science to progress is to continually evaluate the opinions and assertions in a scientific manner, and not to perpetuate beliefs merely because they have may have been published in text books, particularly as these are usually not peer reviewed. In addition, it is very important to ensure that text book conclusions are interpreted correctly so that issues are not further confused.

## References

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4. Shkrum MJ, Ramsay DA. *Forensic pathology of trauma: common problems for the pathologist*. Totowa, NJ: Humana Press, 2007;10.

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