

Letters to the Editor

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The Armed Forces Institute of Pathology: An Underutilized Repository of Case Material

Founded in 1862 as the Army Medical Museum to collect pathologic and surgical material from soldiers in the Civil War, the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (AFIP), located at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC, is one of the world's leading institutes for the study of pathology. The institute staff consists of over 700 US military, Public Health Service, Civil Service, and Department of Veterans Affairs personnel. The AFIP provides services to all military, many federal agencies, and the worldwide civilian medical community.

The institute's major professional activities are consultation, education, and research in pathology. Consultative services are provided through 23 departments specializing in the pathology of all organ systems, plus veterinary pathology,

environmental toxicology, legal medicine, and radiology. Education efforts focus on a broad range of opportunities for US and foreign military and civilian personnel. Research efforts include the application of techniques such as electron microscopy, magnetic resonance imaging, molecular biology, and digital imaging processing to study disease processes. The AFIP also houses the National Museum of Health and Medicine.

The repository of the institute accessions and stores material coded by pathologic diagnosis. The repository stores 2.5 million cases accessioned and coded since 1917. The material comprises written records, 50 million microslides, 30 million paraffin tissue blocks, and 12 million preserved wet tissue specimens. Annually, approximately 50 000 new cases are accessioned and coded into the repository. Cases represent both sexes, all races/ethnicities, all ages; and they come from all over the world. Approximately 10 000 of the cases are cancers; 8000 are benign neoplasms, with the balance representing the entire spectrum of human and animal disease.

The AFIP represents an underutilized public health resource. Pathologic specimens stored at the AFIP can be used to identify cases for nested case-control studies (with appropriate controls). Recently, researchers have begun to link cases of cancer diagnosed in military personnel with prediagnostic sera collected during mandatory human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) testing. Breakthroughs in molecular biology and genetics hold the promise of increasing the value of such studies utilizing tissue blocks. The repository can be used to identify cohorts of cases for prospective studies of unusual tumors. Cases collected at the AFIP can be used to serve as a barometer of disease and as part of a public health surveillance system. For example, AFIP pathologists

might be the first to note the emergence of new infections or trends in disease progression. The repository is an appropriate location for the storage of pathologic material obtained from multicenter medical and epidemiologic studies. Repository capabilities could be expanded to include storage of frozen tissue and other biologic specimens on a national level with appropriate interest and funding.

Proposals for collaborative research with the AFIP are encouraged. Letters outlining a proposed area of research interest are welcome and may be sent to the author at the address below. □

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Requests for reprints and proposals for collaborative research should be sent to Michael R. Peterson, DVM, DrPH, MPH, Department of Repository and Research Services, Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, 6825 16th St NW, Washington, DC 20306-6000.

Daily Movement, Adiposity, and Blood Glucose among Older Adults of Middle to Lower Socioeconomic Status

Despite recent public health recommendations affirming the health benefits of regular, moderate-intensity physical activity, Americans remain predominantly sedentary.¹ Moreover, the prevalence of physical inactivity increases with age and is inversely related to income and education level.² Therefore, the disease risk attributed to sedentary behavior may be disproportionately high among older adults of lower socioeconomic status relative to their younger, wealthier, and more educated counterparts.

We examined the cross-sectional association between an indirect measure of