A94 Why Hasn't the United Kingdom Got a Human Taphonomy Facility (HTF) Yet?

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will have gained an understanding of the issues surrounding the complex and controversial campaign to establish an HTF in the United Kingdom. Attendees will learn about the legal situation and the objections that have been raised from different communities and will hear the arguments for and against HTFs, particularly in the United Kingdom, from scientific, ethical, moral, and religious standpoints. Attendees will hear about positive and negative media publicity surrounding the venture and how this has affected public opinion of the venture.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by giving the current United Kingdom perspective on the HTFs that have been so readily established in other countries and by explaining why the United Kingdom has not followed suit yet. This has important implications for forensic science internationally, as the United Kingdom may draw on and learn from the experiences and expertise of the existing facilities in terms of informing forensic cases and engaging the public.

HTFs, or "Body Farms," are outdoor laboratories where scientific research is conducted on donated human cadavers in order to understand how human decomposition progresses in a variety of conditions. There are currently eight such facilities in the United States, one in Canada, one in Australia, and a "Forensic Cemetery" in mainland Europe.

Currently, in the United Kingdom, empirical decomposition research is conducted using animal analogs (mainly *Sus scrofa*), and university-based Animal Taphonomy Facilities (ATFs). However, concerns have recently been raised about the use of animal remains as human analogs in forensic research.[1-3] There is recognition that HTFs offer the chance to study the effect of certain human conditions and lifestyle choices on decomposition rate and subsequent postmortem interval estimation; something that is not possible to do with animal analogs.[4] This, coupled with the ever-demanding requirements needed of the expert witness in court, including possessing relevant expertise and providing reliable evidence, means that the United Kingdom is falling behind the rest of the world. So, United Kingdom forensic scientists have started to ask the question "Why hasn't the United Kingdom got an HTF yet?"

The possibility of opening an experimental facility is a dramatic and controversial proposal for the United Kingdom, for a variety of reasons. There are objections on scientific grounds, mainly based on concerns about scientific rigor and reproducibility.[5] There is also ethical, moral, and religious opposition, as well as substantial legal obstacles.[6,7] In addition, there is public opinion and perception to consider. There has been a lot in the media recently about this possibility, and it has both garnered support and provoked objections from the public.[8]

This presentation will discuss the current challenges and impediments to the establishment of an HTF in the United Kingdom, the scientific, legal, ethical, and moral objections, and the cogent arguments for and against one in the United Kingdom. It will discuss the risks associated with the creation, delivery, and day-to-day running of a facility. It will show how the United Kingdom situation differs from other countries where HTFs exist, and explore what the United Kingdom can learn from their experiences.

This presentation will also discuss current public opinion in the United Kingdom, based on the results a recent online survey conducted to determine the extent of acceptability of the concept of a HTF among members of the public in the United Kingdom and abroad. This presentation will present an analysis of the respondents' (n=600) views toward different aspects of HTF operation and determine the key areas of support and objection toward a HTF being proposed in the United Kingdom.

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3. Knobel, Z. Ueland, M. Nizio, K.D. Patel, D. and Forbes, S.L. (2018) A comparison of human and pig decomposition rates and odour profiles in an Australian environment. *Australian Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 51 :557-572. DOI: 10.1080/00450618.2018.1439100.
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6. Black, S. (2017) Body farms. *Forensic Science, Medicine and Pathology*, 1-2. DOI: 10.1007/s12024-017-9917-y.
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