

At a Glance

Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

H. WAYNE CARVER, II, MD, *Chief Medical Examiner*

Edward T. McDonough, MD, *Deputy Chief Medical Examiner*

Established - 1970 Statutory authority - Sec. 19a-400 through 19a-414

Conn. Gen. Stat.

Average number of employees - 51 full-time and 14 part-time

Recurring operating expenses, 1999-2000 - \$ 4,386,992

Capital outlay - \$ 77,450

Mission

In Connecticut, all violent, sudden, unexpected and suspicious deaths, deaths related to employment or which constitute a threat to the public health, and deaths of people whose bodies are to be cremated, are reportable to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. It is the mission of this Office to investigate these deaths, certify the cause and manner of death and provide information to legitimate interested parties as defined by law and regulation.

Statutory Responsibility

The Connecticut General Statutes concisely defines what deaths will be investigated. Because of the nature of death, the Office has little control of the number of investigations. During the year, 14,689 deaths were reported to the Medical Examiner's Office. After initial investigation, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner took jurisdiction of 12,311 cases for further investigation, an increase of 3.25% from the previous fiscal year. Most cases are initially investigated by Assistant Medical Examiners serving in communities throughout the state. Of the total number of deaths reported, 8,700 were cremation investigations, a slight decrease from the previous fiscal year. There were 1,522 medicolegal autopsies conducted at the Farmington facility. Of the autopsies performed at the Chief Medical Examiner's Office, 104 were homicide victims, a decrease of 45% from the previous fiscal year. Completed records of homicides, including toxicological analysis, were furnished to the state's attorneys, usually within thirty days following autopsy.

The Office, located on the grounds of the University of Connecticut Health Center in Farmington, operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, year round. It is a long standing goal to investigate deaths presented to this Office in a timely (usually releasing the body to the family within 24 hours) and in a high quality manner. In addition, there is a long-standing goal of completing most reports within thirty (30) days of autopsy.

Public Service; Improvements/Achievements 1999-2000; Reducing Waste

The Office is functionally divided into three parts: Pathology Services; Support Services; Laboratory Services. The Office is especially mindful of delivering services in a timely, efficient, high quality manner, and at the least cost possible. A summary of our improvements/achievements includes: ongoing use of universal precautions (with respect to blood borne disease); health and safety training and simplifying operations. An agency initiated operational review is currently being conducted by representatives of the Office of Policy & Management.

Support services includes all non clinical activities and provides all services in support of the physicians, employees, and decedent families. Ongoing review of our business practices continues to result in small, but important, steps to streamline and simplify office operations. We continue to utilize the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provided by the University of Connecticut Health Center.

During this period, the facility was under the control of the State Department of Public Works and managed by a private company. Several health and safety issues continue to be addressed resulting in a better environment for the employees as well as to protect evidence.

As a result of installation of information technology hardware and software in 1990, Connecticut has one of the largest databases of accumulated death investigation data in the country (over 140,000 records). The office produced 342 computerized statistical reports during the year. Report recipients include state's attorneys, public defenders, hospital quality control departments and researchers. The Office continues its migration to paperless processes to further reduce repetitive manual entry while increasing service response. During this period the office received authorization and funding to acquire a contemporary, windows based death investigation system software application. Our website continues to be regularly accessed by interested individuals. Everyone is encouraged to visit our website at <http://www.state.ct.us/ocme>.

In the toxicology and histology laboratories, we continue to invest in technological advances to more efficiently and effectively detect increasingly complex post mortem testing of tissue and fluids.

Five pathology residents from two hospital training programs in Connecticut and five medical students from the University of Connecticut Health Center spent an elective rotation at the Chief Medical Examiner's Office. Twelve pathology master degree candidates from Quinnipiac College, eight interns from the University of New Haven, five Connecticut State Troopers and medical students from Poland and Scotland spent a rotation observing and assisting in the performance of autopsies during this period.

An average of fifteen residents from several hospital pathology programs statewide participated in our forensic pathology seminar during 1999-2000. Educational programs were provided to law enforcement personnel at the Connecticut Municipal Police Academy and Connecticut State Police Training Academy, to medical students at the University of Connecticut Health Center, Yale University School of Medicine and to many professional and community groups across the state.

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner continues its ongoing initiative to continuously improve the quality and delivery of its critical services in a timely, efficient and caring manner, and is committed to the letter and spirit of equal opportunity and affirmative action for all.

The Chapter 368q of the Connecticut General Statutes places the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner under the supervision of the Commission on Medicolegal Investigations. The commission met at the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in Farmington on September 24 and November 19, 1999 and on January 28, March 24 and May 19, 2000. The March 24, 2000 meeting was the annual open meeting at which member of constituent groups and representatives of the public are invited to address the Commission.

Commission membership during fiscal year 1999-2000: Joxel Garcia, Commissioner, Department of Public Health, Hartford; Robert E. Cone, Ph.D., Professor of Pathology, University of Connecticut Health Center, Farmington; Francis R. Coughlin, M.D., JD, Physician and Attorney, New Canaan; S. Evans Downing, M.D., Professor of Pathology, Yale University School of Medicine, New Haven; Steven B. Duke, JD, Professor of Law, Yale University School of Law; New Haven; Todd Fernow, JD, University of Connecticut Law School, Hartford; Susan Keane Baker, MHA, public member, Glastonbury; Daniel C. Niejadlik, M.D., Physician, Essex; Richard A. Lavelly, M.D., JD,MS, MPH, Connecticut Bar Association. Dr. Downing was re-elected to continue serving as chairman.