

At a Glance

Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

James R. Gill, MD, Chief Medical Examiner

Maura E. DeJoseph, DO, Deputy Chief Medical Examiner

Established - 1970 Statutory authority - Sec. CGS 19a-400 through 19a-415

Address: 11 Shuttle Road, Farmington, CT 06032

Average number of employees – 50 full-time (authorized) and 13 part-time

Recurring operating expenses, 2014-2015 \$ 5,589,465

Organizational Structure: Independent agency comprised of 3 sections: Pathology, Laboratory, and Management Services.

Mission

The mission of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) is to:

- Investigate reported deaths (indicated below)
- Accurately certify the cause and manner of death
- Explain and clarify investigative findings for the family
- Identify, document, and interpret relevant forensic scientific information for use in criminal and civil legal proceedings necessary in the investigation of violent, suspicious, and sudden unexpected deaths.
- To provide information to legitimate interested parties as defined by law and regulation.
- Use investigative information to protect the public health.

Our goal is to investigate deaths presented to this Office in a timely and high quality manner; transport and then release the remains within 24 hours; and complete 90% of OCME reports within sixty days of the investigation.

Medicolegal investigations protect the public by producing accurate vital statistics records, providing information that may prevent unnecessary litigation, protect those who may have been falsely accused, and assist the courts in the proper adjudication in criminal matters; diagnosing previously unsuspected contagious disease; identifying hazardous environmental conditions in the workplace, in the home, and elsewhere; identifying trends such as rate changes in homicides, motor vehicle fatalities, and drug-related deaths; and identifying new types and forms of drugs appearing in the state, or existing drugs/substances becoming new subjects of abuse.

The mission of the Office is accomplished by three sections: Pathology, Laboratory, and Management Services. The OCME is located on the grounds of the University of Connecticut Health Center in Farmington and operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, year round.

Statutory Responsibility

The Connecticut General Statutes dictate which deaths are reportable to the Medical Examiner's Office. It is then the OCME's responsibility to determine whether or not jurisdiction should be assumed and what investigative functions need to be exercised in order to execute the statutory mandate. Reportable cases include:

- All violent, sudden, unexpected and suspicious deaths.
- Deaths related to employment or those which constitute a threat to the public health.
- Deaths of people whose bodies are to be cremated.
- Deaths that occur outside of a normal hospital setting.
- Deaths under anesthesia in the operating room, recovery room or those resulting from diagnostic or therapeutic procedures must be called into our office.
- All drug deaths related to poisoning, drug abuse, or addiction.

Chapter 368q of the Connecticut General Statutes places OCME under the control and supervision of the Commission on Medicolegal Investigations.

Commission membership during fiscal year 2014-2015:

Chair: Todd Fernow, JD, University of Connecticut, School of Law

Vice Chair: John Sinard, MD, PhD, Professor of Pathology, Yale University, School of Medicine

Sidney Hopfer, PhD, Professor of Pathology, University of Connecticut, School of Medicine

Celia Pinzi, Public Member, West Haven

Steven B. Duke, JD, Professor of Law, Yale University, School of Law

Richard A. Lavelly, MD, JD, MS, MPH, Connecticut Bar Association

Jewel Mullen, MD, MPH, MPA, Commissioner, Department of Public Health

Susan Keane Baker, MHA, Public Member, New Canaan

Isaac Goodrich, MD, Connecticut Medical Society

Public Service Improvements

The chief recipients of our public service are the next-of-kin of the decedents whose deaths fall under our jurisdiction. Our goal is to investigate and certify these deaths in a timely, efficient, and caring manner. The expeditious removal and then release of the remains to the funeral home is part of this process. It is important for timely scene investigation and removal of remains from scenes so as not to add to the emotional burden of the family. Our examinations should be done as expeditiously as possible in order for the remains to be returned to the family for timely funeral arrangements. For cremation certification, our goal is to conduct a timely and appropriately thorough inquiry into the death.

Our work also involves and/or benefits treating physicians, law enforcement agencies, funeral directors, the legal system, public health agencies, and the general public. The OCME continues its ongoing initiative to improve the quality and delivery of its critical services (please see below for methods of improvement). We gauge our office forensic practice through accreditation by National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) and a variety of office metrics for completion of autopsy reports and length of time for examination completion. Our record's section responded to 4,280 requests for reports and sent out 2,985 reports to various governmental agencies and 1,097 to families, attorneys, and insurance companies.

In addition to normal agency operations, the agency receives and responds to innumerable requests for information from state, municipal and federal agencies, research facilities, and many other organizations who utilize our data. The OCME's information technology (IT) section produced substantial computerized statistical reports during the year including substance abuse and homicide data. Recipients included state's attorneys, several state agencies, public defenders, hospital quality control departments, researchers, and the media. We participate in data collection for the National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) and Suicide investigation and prevention.

Pathology residents (from hospital training programs at Yale, Hartford Hospital, and Danbury Hospital), investigative interns (from the University of Connecticut Health Center), and master degree students in Forensic Sciences (from the University of New Haven) typically spend an elective rotation at the OCME. Pathologist's Assistants (master degree candidates) from Quinnipiac University spend a rotation observing and assisting in the performance of autopsies. Educational programs have been provided to law enforcement personnel, medical students at the University of Connecticut and Yale University Schools of Medicine, and for many professional and community groups across the state.

The OCME has started a fax-cremation certificate process that will make it easier and more expeditious for funeral directors to obtain their cremation certificates. These fax cremation requests, which decrease call volume and telephone hold times for funeral directors, have steadily increased as more and more funeral directors take advantage of it.

Achievements 2014-2015

The Office underwent its annual accreditation evaluation by the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) and was granted continued full accreditation. OCME continues its ongoing initiative to continuously improve the quality and delivery of its critical services. Due to a 47.9% increase in the number of autopsies (1,420 in fiscal year 2013 and 1,977 in 2014 with a projected 2,100 in calendar year 2015) and a associate medical examiner retirement, the number of autopsies per medical examiner has increased. These factors will affect autopsy report completion times and put the office at risk for accreditation issues due to excessive medical examiner caseloads. Even with refilling the recent retiree position, the addition of an eighth medical examiner will likely be needed. This increase in autopsies puts additional demands on every facet of our office including mortuary technicians, transportation services, medical secretaries and records, processing technicians, and the investigations team.

Laboratory Services: An RFP for toxicology testing was issued in 2015 and National Medical Service was the successful vendor. Our turn-around time for final toxicology reports averages 11.6 days. 90% or more of toxicology reports must be done within 90 days to avoid a loss of accreditation. For fiscal 2014-2015, 99% of toxicology reports were completed within 30 days.

Pathology Services: For NAME accreditation, the turn-around-times for autopsy reports must be 90% or more completed within 60 days and 90% or more (of homicides) completed within 90 days. The turn-around-times for all autopsy reports for 2014 were 90% completed within 60 days and 96% completed within 90 days.

A private transport service is used as backup support for our mortuary transport team to ensure rapid removal of remains in instances when the primary team is otherwise occupied.

Management Services: Administrative support services returned to the OCME late in fiscal year 2015. Health and safety issues are continually addressed with the expected result of a better environment for the employees and protection of evidence. The facility is under the control of the State Department of Public Works and managed by a private company.

Information Reported as Required by State Statute

The agency remains committed to the principles of affirmative action and equal employment opportunity. As in prior years, the agency's affirmative action plan submitted to the C.H.R.O. was recommended for approval. Additionally, according to UCONN Health Center, who provided support services, the OCME met 3

5% of its set aside goal for small business contracts, and met 13% of its goal for minority business enterprise contracts. As required by state statute, the agency supplies yearly information to the Office of Policy and Management, Office of Fiscal Analysis and Office of the State Comptroller.

Our website is regularly accessed by interested individuals. Please visit our website at <http://www.state.ct.us/ocme>.

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