

Fiscal Year 2017-2018

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 - Conn Gen Statutes Sec. 19a-400-415

Address: 11 Shuttle Road, Farmington, CT 06032

Average number of employees – 50 full-time authorized (49 actual) and 13 part-time

Recurring operating expenses (2017-2018): \$6,250,446

Collected revenue (2017-2018): \$2,757,135

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
- 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 unexpected deaths.
- Provide information to legitimate interested parties per 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, providing information that may prevent unnecessary litigation, protect those who may have been falsely accused, and assist the courts in the proper adjudication of criminal matters; diagnosing previously unsuspected contagious disease; identifying hazardous environmental conditions in the workplace, in the home, and elsewhere; identifying trends such as changes in homicidal, motor vehicular, and drug-related death rates; and identify 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.

Action Items

1. Hire a 9th medical examiner to regain full NAME accreditation.
2. Work with DPH to implement an electronic death registration system (EDRS) to replace paper death certificates.
3. Implement an electronic payment system for medical records and cremation certificates.

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, unexpected, and suspicious deaths.
- All deaths related to poisoning, drug abuse, or addiction.
- Deaths related to employment or 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.

Chapter 368q of the Connecticut General Statutes places OCME under the control and supervision of the Commission on Medicolegal Investigations whose members are appointed by the Governor.

Commission membership during fiscal year 2017-2018:

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

Michael T. McCormack, JD, Connecticut Bar Association (appointed: February 15, 2017)

Raul Pino, MD, MPH, Commissioner, Department of Public Health

Olinda Morales, JD, Commissioner Pino's Designee

Susan Keane Baker, MHA, Public Member, New Canaan

VACANT, Connecticut Medical Society

The Commission is updating the agency regulations.

Public Service

The chief recipients of our public service are the next-of-kin of the decedents who fall under our jurisdiction. Our goal is to investigate and certify these deaths in a timely, high quality, efficient, and caring manner. The expeditious removal and then release of the remains to the funeral home is part of this process. Our work also involves and/or benefits treating physicians, law enforcement agencies, funeral directors, the legal system, public health agencies, and the general public. We gauge our 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 medical record's section responded to 5,693 written requests for reports and sent out 3,801 reports to various governmental agencies and 1,247 to families, attorneys, and insurance companies. We have begun a computer based protocol for handling the documents the OCME generates and have expedited several processes through the use of this technology.

In addition to normal agency operations, we receive and respond 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).

Pathology residents (from hospital training programs at Yale, Hartford Hospital, and Danbury Hospital) and master degree candidates 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 Yale University School of Medicine, physician assistant students from Sacred Heart University, and for many professional and community groups across the state.

Improvements/Achievements 2017-2018

Every five years we have an on-site National accreditation inspection by NAME. The most recent inspection occurred in January 2017. *Unfortunately, the OCME was notified in February 2017 that we had lost full accreditation.* We have been successful in correcting all deficiencies except one. At this point, the only deficiency that is preventing a return to full accreditation is the need for one more medical examiner. With the help of DPH and DESPP, we have been able to obtain federal grant assistance for some of the expenses incurred due to the opioid crisis.

Laboratory Services: The NAME accreditation benchmark for toxicology reporting is that 90% or more of toxicology reports must be completed within 90 days to avoid a loss of accreditation. For fiscal year 2017-2018, 99% of the NMS toxicology reports were completed within 30 days; the average NMS toxicology report turn-around time was 12 days. Beginning in August, 2016, toxicology testing on certain cases (homicides, traumatic suicides, and motor vehicle collisions) were sent to the lab of the Connecticut Division of Scientific Services under DESPP. For fiscal year 2017-2018, 75% of the DESPP toxicology reports were completed within 30 days; the average DESPP toxicology report turn-around time was 24 days.

The OCME has a very active Anthropology Laboratory service, under the direction of a part-time Forensic Anthropologist. She has been essential to the death investigation of skeletonized remains and unidentified persons.

Pathology Services: Up to June 2018, we had seven medical examiners which is the same number the OCME had in 1989 when approximately 1,400 autopsies were performed each year. In fiscal year 2017-2018, we performed 2,385 autopsies and 383 external examinations (an 8th medical examiner started in July of 2018). To avoid a NAME accreditation deficiency, no medical examiner should perform over 250 autopsies per year. If over 325 autopsies are performed per ME, there is automatic loss of accreditation. This is why the OCME needs a total of 9 medical examiners. We are making progress and hope soon to be in a position to regain full accreditation.

We have had discussions with DPH about the electronic death registration. Connecticut is one of two States in the Country that does not have it. It allows for the use of electronic death certificates instead of paper. The implementation of this system will greatly decrease costs both in postal services and in time. Funeral homes would not need to come to the office to pick up the death certificate and we would not have to mail amended copies. This continues to be a priority.

Management Services: The business office has reduced the outstanding accounts receivable balance while working with agency customers. We are investigating to add an electronic billing service. The facility is under the control of the Department of Administrative Services Bureau of Properties and Facilities Management and managed by a private company. With these collaborative partnerships, the OCME is striving to meet the growing operational demands within the same building structure since 1986. A new cooler was completed in summer 2017 for increased refrigerated storage capacity for human remains, a project which also resolved one of our NAME deficiencies. A new roof was completed in spring 2018 and we have updated some autopsy tables and cooler space. Health and safety issues are continually addressed with the expected result of a better environment for the employees and protection of evidence. Our safety committee is highly active and productive.

Information Reported as Required by State Statute

The agency remains committed to the principles of affirmative action and equal employment opportunity. Unfortunately our affirmative action plan was not approved by C.H.R.O. We defended our plan at a hearing and got valuable feedback on how to improve it. We now submit on an annual basis until reapproved. Additionally, the OCME met 219% of its set aside goal for certified small business purchases, and met 262% of its goal for certified minority business enterprise purchases. As required by state statute, the agency provides data reports and information to the Office of Policy and Management, Office of Fiscal Analysis, and Office of the State Comptroller on a continuous basis.

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

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 State Capitol
 Hartford, CT 06106

