

New Mexico Office of the Medical Investigator

Presented to Courts, Corrections & Justice Committee
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History

- Moved from County Coroner “Justice of Peace” system in 1973
- New system provided for statewide medical examiner system based at the UNM School of Medicine to assure quality service



Importance of Quality Death Investigation System

- Determine correct cause and manner of death in reasonable amount of time
 - Families need information
- Support prosecution of crimes
 - District attorneys rely on OMI testimony
- Discover emerging trends in causes of death to facilitate and support prevention measures
 - Hantavirus
 - Prescription drug overdoses

Benefits of basing OMI physicians at UNM

- Attracts high quality forensic pathologists
- Guarantees enhanced clinical and technical consultations
- Training program produces well-trained new forensic pathologists
- Research can focus on public health issues in New Mexico
- Provides access to UNM infrastructure and support
- Educational mission is funded by UNM School of Medicine

- Implications of basing OMI physicians at UNM
 - Multiple missions of
 - Service
 - Education
 - Research



Service Requirements

Required by Statute and Rules

- **Complete medico legal death investigation**
 - **Receive notice of and respond to scenes of reportable deaths**
 - **Take custody of body, maintain chain of custody**
 - **Conduct investigation into cause and manner of death**
 - **Obtain toxicology samples and arrange for necessary testing**
 - **Certify cause and manner of death**
 - **Cooperate with authorized agencies having involvement with death investigation (District Attorneys, Law Enforcement, FBI, Department of Health)**

Educational Requirements

- Faculty of School of Medicine, Department of Pathology
- Teaching blocks to undergraduate medical students
- Pathology residency program co-directors
- Required UNM SOM Pathology residency training
- Forensic pathology fellowship program (4 per year)

Research

- National Violent Death Reporting System (CDC)
- Sudden Unexplained Infant Death System (CDC)
- Med-X project (CDC)
- Victims of Crimes Act (VOCA) grant
- Utility of Post-mortem CT grant (NIJ)

Other State and Federal Collaborations Using OMI Data

- Child Fatality Review
- Department of Transportation traffic fatality data
- Death certificate data to Bureau of Vital Statistics
- Multiple Agency Collaborations

STATISTICS CY 2011

- 15,982 total deaths in New Mexico*
- 5,341 deaths investigated
- 2,081 autopsies performed
- 2,111 toxicology requests
- 227 autopsies performed for tribal, federal and private entities
- 77 UNMH and VA autopsies performed
- 153 forensic dental identification exams
- 6 human and animal bite mark evaluations
- 45 forensic anthropology cases

* BVS records for 2011

Accreditation

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MEDICAL
EXAMINERS (NAME)

COLLEGE OF AMERICAN PATHOLOGISTS (CAP)

OMI Financing

- Sources of funds
 - State appropriations account for approximately 61% of budget
 - Department of Pathology assumes faculty teaching expenses of approximately 6% of budget
 - Contracts, fees and grants account for remaining

QUESTIONS?