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?