

THE ROLE OF THE MEDICAL EXAMINER

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WHERE DOES THE OFFICE COME FROM?

- The Coroner
- Death Taxes
- The Sheriff

DIFFERENT DEATH INVESTIGATION SYSTEMS

- Some states have medical examiners.
- Some states have coroners.
- Some states have both.
- One state (Texas), has counties with justice of the peace officers.

MEDICAL EXAMINERS

- Are appointed
- Must be licensed physician
- May have state, county or district jurisdiction

CORONERS

- Are elected
- Need not be a physician
- May be county or district jurisdiction

BRIEF HISTORY

- Coroner Dates from 1194, during the reign of Richard the Lionheart (Cour de Lion).
 - He needed money.
- Sheriffs kept much of the Crown's revenue stream.
- Hubert Walter and "Articles of Eyre"

BRIEF HISTORY

- Article 20
- "IN EVERY COUNTY OF THE KING'S REALM SHALL BE ELECTED THREE KNIGHTS AND ONE CLERK, TO KEEP THE PLEAS OF THE CROWN "
- "custos placitorum coronas"
- Hence the term "coroner."
- Income derived from estates and fines from complicated rules regarding the dead.

CORONERS

- In some states, there are coroners juries
 - They do what they want
- No statutory obligation to hire a professional
- Contract bidding to non-FP groups

State Death Investigation System by Type,
USA, 1996 (cont'd)

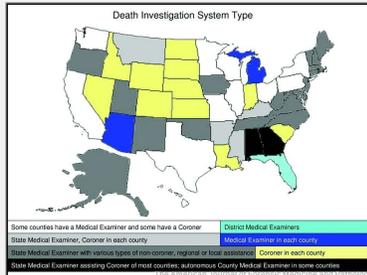
Coroner System (11)

- A. District Coroner (2)
 - Kansas Nevada
- B. County Coroner (9)
 - Colorado Louisiana Ohio
 - Idaho Nebraska South Dakota
 - Indiana North Dakota Wyoming

BRIEF HISTORY

- If you really want to get more information:
 - <http://www.britannia.com/history/coroner1.html>

DEATH INVESTIGATION SYSTEMS



[The Conversion of Coroner Systems to Medical Examiner Systems in the United States: A List in the Action](#)

Handick, Randy
The American Journal of Forensic Medicine and Pathology, 28(4):279-283, December 2007.
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State Death Investigation System by Type. USA, 1996

Medical Examiner System (22)

- A. State Medical Examiner (19)
- | | | |
|----------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Connecticut | New Hampshire | Tennessee |
| Delaware | New Jersey | Utah |
| District of Columbia | New Mexico | Vermont |
| Iowa | North Carolina | Virginia |
| Maine | Oklahoma | West Virginia |
| Maryland | Oregon | |
| Massachusetts | Rhode Island | |
- B. District Medical Examiner (1) Florida
- C. County Medical Examiner (2)
- | | |
|---------|----------|
| Arizona | Michigan |
|---------|----------|

MICHIGAN COMPILED LAWS

- Chapter 52.201- 52.216
- The Office of the Medical Examiner
- Originated from the Coroner

CASES WHERE AUTOPSY IS ROUTINE

- All homicides and suspicious death.
- Death which occur under unusual circumstances.
- All prisoners who die in custody or in jail.
- Apparent natural deaths in which the COD is uncertain.
- Fatal traffic accident especially drivers and pedestrians. (passengers?)
- Practically all drowning which occur in public water, bathtubs and in swimming pools.
- Drug deaths or chemical poisoning.

THE MEDICAL EXAMINER'S AUTOPSY IS INTENDED TO:

- Assist the police in
 - Detecting crime
 - finding the guilty
 - protect the innocent
 - identification
- Establish for workman compensation commission relationship between cause of death with type of work.
- Establish statistics of causes of death.
- Detect epidemics.

CASES WHERE WE DO USUALLY AN
AUTOPSY BUT IT'S NOT EXPLICITLY
DEFINED

- Nontraumatic hospital admissions where death occurs within 24 hours.
- Where the cause of death is apparent but obtaining background information takes longer than doing the autopsy and subsequent workup.
- The social autopsy
 - Family requests
 - Physician questions
 - The social autopsy:
 - The autopsy that takes longer to explain why you didn't do than the time it actually takes to do.

THE AUTOPSY

- Is an investigative tool
- There is no language in the medical examiner statute that says you have to do one
- It does not always provide information that helps explain a death occurred
- But:
 - A negative autopsy can be as informative as one where you do find pathologic changes
 - This is why scene reenactments are so important
 - Context is everything
 - What you find in the autopsy may be different from what the clinicians documented.
 - Especially radiology

POSTMORTEM EXAMINATION

- Who was the victim?
- How long has the victim been dead?
- Why did the victim die?

SO WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH CDR?

ROLE IN CHILD DEATH

- The authority regarding the cause and the manner of death

ROLE IN CHILD DEATH

- Who is the medical examiner in your jurisdiction?
 - A pathologist?
 - A forensic pathologist?
 - Another kind of practitioner?

ROLE IN CHILD DEATH

- The medical examiner, in determining the cause and the manner of death, serves as a gate keeper regarding their medicolegal consequences
- There are medical examiners with no training in forensic issues making cause of death decisions

ROLE IN CHILD DEATH

- In a review team, the medical examiner integrates the information from different agencies, and, if necessary, modifies the cause and manner of death if new information warrants it

ROLE IN CHILD DEATH

- Medical examiners make decisions that have significant impact
 - Can a prosecutor prosecute?
 - Lifestyle changes for a family
 - Is genetic testing needed?
 - Will there be legal action against another individual?
 - Will an autopsy be done?

**NUMBER OF FORENSIC
PATHOLOGISTS**

- As of June, 2014
 - 1500 pathologists certified in FP since 1959.

- Source: Randy Hanzlick - N.A.M.E.

**NUMBER OF FORENSIC
PATHOLOGISTS**

- About 200,000 people needed to support one FP full time
- There are 320,000,000 people in the U.S.
 - 1600 F.T.E.s
- It is thought there are about 400 full time Board Certified FPs
- About 30 are produced yearly

**NUMBER OF FORENSIC
PATHOLOGISTS**

- Wayne County has 1.8 million people
 - 5 forensic pathologists
 - We have 10 F.T.E.s
 - There are 27 board-certified forensic pathologists in Michigan

WHO IS YOUR MEDICAL EXAMINER?

- Does he/she know what to do with the death of a child?
- In Michigan, in the absence of a medical examiner, the Health Officer can assume that role
 - Nurses
 - An administrator that may or may not have an M.P.H.

WHO IS YOUR MEDICAL EXAMINER?

- A knowledgeable medical examiner is indispensable for the evaluation of pediatric deaths
- There is a need for a system managed by State Government that will refer these cases to the appropriate professionals

WHO IS YOUR MEDICAL EXAMINER?

- Although most deaths will have an apparent cause, not all of them do
- CDR can help provide input and context in cases where the cause of death is equivocal, or is not what it seems to be
