

Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

At a Glance

H. WAYNE CARVER, II, MD, *Chief Medical Examiner*

Deputy Chief Medical Examiner – *vacant*

Established - 1970

Statutory authority – CGS Sec. 19a-400 through 19a-415

Office address - 11 Shuttle Road, Farmington, CT 06032

Average number of employees – 58 full-time (authorized) and 11 part-time*

Recurring operating expenses 2010-2011 - \$ 5,611,004

Organizational structure - Independent agency comprised of three sections: Pathology, Laboratory and Management Services.

Mission

Our mission is to provide accurate certification of the cause of death and to 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, by properly trained physicians. Providing such information may prevent unnecessary litigation, protect those who may have been falsely accused, and lead to proper adjudication in criminal matters.

Medicolegal investigations also protect the public health: by diagnosing previously unsuspected contagious disease; by identifying hazardous environmental conditions in the workplace, in the home, and elsewhere; by identifying trends such as changes in numbers of homicides, traffic fatalities, and drug and alcohol related deaths; and by identifying new types and forms of drugs appearing in the state, or existing drugs/substances becoming new subjects of abuse.

Statutory Responsibility

The Connecticut General Statutes dictate which deaths are reportable to the Medical Examiner's Office. It is then the Medical Examiner'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 the following:

- 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

It is the mission of this office to investigate these deaths, certify the cause and manner of death and provide information to legitimate interested parties as defined by law and regulation. Due to the nature of these cases, the Office has little control of the number of investigations that it undertakes. After initial review, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME)'s responsibility is to take jurisdiction of cases that meet the criteria indicated above for further investigation.

The Office is composed of three departments: Pathology Services; Laboratory Services and Management Services, 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. Our goal is to investigate deaths presented to this Office in a timely manner; release the body to the family (thru the funeral home) within 24 hours and complete all required reports within ninety days of autopsy.

Public Service; Improvements/Achievements 2010-11

Administrative: In addition to normal agency operations, the agency receives and responds to an innumerable amount of requests for information from state, municipal and federal agencies, research facilities and many other organizations who utilize our data.

The agency continues to work with the Department of Public Health to automate the death registry process whereby information can be transmitted electronically to the funeral homes and then in turn to the various registrar's office. The agency is also collaborating with the Department of Social Services in handling unclaimed decedents (who have no next of kin to assume the responsibility of burial arrangements).

Our office has one of the largest databases of accumulated death investigation data in the country, well over 325,000 records. The Office produced substantial computerized statistical reports during the year. Recipients included state's attorneys, several state agencies, public defenders, hospital quality control departments, researchers and the media.

In the toxicology and histology laboratories, we continue to strive towards technological advances to efficiently and effectively perform increasingly complex post mortem testing of tissue and fluids.

The facility is under the control of the State Department of Public Works and managed by a private company. Health and safety issues are continually addressed with the expected result of a better environment for the employees and protection of evidence.

Training Program: Pathology residents from hospital training programs in Connecticut, 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 OCME. Pathology assistants (master degree candidates) from Quinnipiac University spend a rotation observing and assisting in the performance of autopsies during this period. An average of eighteen residents from several hospital pathology programs statewide participate on a yearly basis in our forensic pathology seminar. Educational programs were provided to law enforcement personnel at the Connecticut Municipal Police Academy and Connecticut State Police Training Academy, to medical students at the University of Connecticut Health Center, Yale University School of Medicine and to many professional and community groups across the state. Additionally, OCME continues to participate in many outreach programs that target juniors and seniors at the high school level. OCME continues its ongoing initiative to continuously improve the quality and delivery of its critical services in a timely, efficient and caring manner.

Commission: Chapter 368q of the Connecticut General Statutes places OCME under the supervision of the Commission on Medicolegal Investigations. The commission met at the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in Farmington on several occasions to discuss agency operations and other matters.

Commission membership during fiscal year 2010-2011:

Chairman: Todd Fernow, JD, University of Connecticut Law School, Hartford

Vice Chairman: John Sinard, M.D., Connecticut Medical Society

Secretary: Robert E. Cone, Ph.D., Professor of Pathology, University of CT Health Center, Farmington- retired prior to June 30, 2011

Celia Pinzi, Public member, West Haven

Steven B. Duke, JD, Professor of Law, Yale Univ, School of Law, New Haven

Richard A. Lavelly, M.D., JD, MS, MPH, Connecticut Bar Association

Robert Galvin, MD, Commissioner, Department of Public Health

Susan Keane Baker, MHA, Public member, New Canaan

Frank Scarpa, MD, Connecticut Medical Society

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 approved. Additionally, the agency exceeded its set side goals for small and 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 continues to be regularly accessed by interested individuals. Please visit our website at <http://www.state.ct.us/ocme>.

*Authorized count was reduced to 58 positions in FY2011