

COMMISSION ON MEDICOLEGAL INVESTIGATIONS

MINUTES

March 24, 2023

The open meeting of the Commission on Medicolegal Investigations was held at the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) in Farmington, CT on Friday March 24, 2023.

Present: Todd D. Fernow, J.D. Chairman (Remotely)
Sidney M. Hopfer, Ph.D. Secretary (Remotely)
John H. Sinard, M.D., Vice Chairman (Remotely)
Michael Krinsky, M.D. (Remotely)
Susan Keane Baker, M.H.A. (Remotely)
Beth Frugale DPH (Remote; Late Arrival 2:27)

Absent: Celia Pinzi

Also Present: James R. Gill, M.D., Chief Medical Examiner
Maura E. DeJoseph, D.O., Deputy Chief Medical Examiner
Linda Sylvia, Executive Secretary
Lincoln Dwayne Gordon, OCME Administrator
John Casio, CT Funeral Directors Association (remote, brief attendance with audio difficulties)
Jesse Gomes, CT Funeral Directors Association (remote, brief attendance with audio difficulties)

Call to order at 201pm. Commissioner Fernow reminded all that this was the open meeting of COMLI. There were no additional observers at the time the meeting was called to order.

Commissioner Fernow asked for comments or corrections to the minutes that COMLI members had reviewed from the prior meeting. A question was raised on the phrasing used in the minutes on the election of COMLI officers. Commissioner Fernow clarified that it was not a tabled issue, rather no votes have been taken. On the topic of COMLI membership, Commissioner Fernow mentioned that he has had no additional correspondence from Mr. Scanlon. He did handle one inquiry from someone at the UCONN Law School asking what it was like to be on the COMLI.

There were no other clarifications or corrections made to the minutes. The minutes were adopted.

Medical Examiner Summary

Dr. Gill provided the Chief Medical Examiner report to the COMLI. He provided some preliminary information from case numbers since the beginning of 2023 that indicate that the autopsy numbers have decreased. He cautioned that we do not yet know how this will trend across the year.

Dr. Gill explained that the 2022 deaths due to accidental overdose data has been released. This data showed about a 5% reduction in deaths due to overdose compared to 2021.

Turnaround times for death investigations by the Medical Examiners continue to meet 90% within 90 days; however, do not currently meet the 90% in 60 days goal. The OCME has two vacant Medical Examiner positions, which is impairing the ability of the full-time Medical Examiners to keep pace between autopsy duty and completion of paperwork. Per diem staff are helping.

The Investigators attended 99% of the death scenes in the prior month.

On the topic of physician recruitment, Dr. Gill explained that applications have been received, interviews done, but no one that has taken an offer of employment. He explained that our office is busy, which may be a deterrent.

Regarding the OCME facility, as previously discussed the architect has been hired and OCME will attend a Bond Commission meeting and provide testimony on March 27th, 2023. There has been no work progress as of this time.

Unclaimed remains have become much less of an issue with the updates to the CT General Statutes (CGS). The number of unclaimed bodies at OCME for more than 30 days is 33. The total volume of bodies at OCME is also at a low, of 70. The recent reduction in case volume over the few days before the COMLI may be an explanation for this as well. The Commissioners were pleased that OCME has a more streamlined process with the legislative modifications and pleased that the funeral directors were not offering any complaints about the process.

Dr. DeJoseph provided an update on the EDRS – CaseManager interface. It is proposed that the interface may be operational by mid to late April. This will allow for bidirectional flow of cases between the two systems for the purposes of creating and reviewing death certificates.

Dr. Gill offered that in the future, if appropriate staffing levels were achieved, that OCME may be able to Quality Review (QR) all death records in the State of Connecticut.

Fiscal Summary

Lincoln Dwayne Gordon provided the fiscal update for OCME. He used the provided meeting materials / spreadsheets to illustrate the current staffing and vacancies, along with the recruitment summary provided by Jaime Sanz, Human Resources Director. The fellowship grant funding and utilization was presented. A summary of Personnel Services (PS) and Operating Expenses (OE) were shared, with acknowledgment that OCME may be asked to testify before the Legislature about a deficiency. It was explained that a deficiency in Personnel Services may be eligible for coverage through the state Reserve Salary Adjustment fund, given that these were contractually obligated raises. Deficiency in operating expenses was driven by the security guard compensation and the web-based HR platform that OCME is looking to subscribe to. A summary of revenue streams was reviewed. All revenue is represented as a negative number. The number of instances of billing for civil testimony and case involvement is very infrequent. A breakdown of cremations reported to OCME via the faxed paper process was provided and the downward trend explained. This is a direct result of more and more cremations being processed electronically and paid electronically. Accounts receivable and overdue amounts were reviewed. The business office plans to continue efforts to claim the funds that are overdue. A Lepow fund summary was provided. The OCME organization chart was also presented.

Other Conversation:

Dr. Krinsky shared information with the COMLI on the topic of physician recruitment and Connecticut. He explained that published market research has ranked Connecticut as 33 out of 50 for places to work as a physician. COMLI raised other ideas on recruitment barriers such as salary, geography and necessity of living closer to family.

Dr. Krinsky brought up to the COMLI that Senate Bill #9 was moving along within the legislative process. This bill addresses the needle centers and whether Connecticut would become a state to allow them. Dr. Krinsky felt that this could impact the number of deaths, however would not help the substance use problem, and therefore unsure if it would help overall with reduced mortality.

Executive Session:

The commissioners agreed there was no need for Executive Session.

Announcements:

Commissioner Fernow announced to the COMLI that Linda Sylvia was retiring at the end of March (March 31, 2023). He thanked her for her service to the state, OCME, COMLI and especially to the office during some very difficult times, including Sandy Hook. The other COMLI members also extended congratulations and gratitude.

An announcement that the next meeting would be on June 30th.

Other Attendees:

At 2:29 pm it was noticed that the CT Funeral Directors Association appeared on the GoToMeeting list. They experienced technical difficulties and had only video connection, without audio. Beth Frugale announced them as being John Cascio and Jesse Gomes. They soon left the web meeting as they could not obtain microphone access.

Adjournment:

There were no other matters to address. Followed by a motion to adjourn. Meeting adjourned at 2:35pm.

Sidney M Hopfer, PhD
Secretary