

# Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

## *At a Glance*

**JAMES R. GILL, MD, Chief Medical Examiner**

**Maura DeJoseph, DO, Deputy Chief Medical Examiner**

***Established - 1970 Statutory authority - Sec. CGS 19a-400 through 19a-415***

***Address: 11 Shuttle Road, Farmington, CT 06032***

***Average number of employees – 51 full-time (authorized) and 10 part-time***

***Recurring operating expenses, 2013-2014 - \$ 5,761,690***

***Organizational Structure: Independent agency comprised of 3 sections: Pathology, Laboratory and Management Services.***

## **Mission**

***The mission of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) is to:***

- ***Investigate reported deaths (indicated below)***
- ***Accurately certify the cause and manner of death***
- ***Explain and clarify investigative findings for the family***
- ***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.***
- ***To provide information to legitimate interested parties as defined by law and regulation.***
- ***Use investigative information to protect the public health.***

***Our goal is to investigate deaths presented to this Office in a timely and high quality manner; transport and then release the remains within 24 hours; and complete 90% of reports within sixty days of the investigation.***

***Medicolegal investigations protect the public by producing accurate vital statistics records, providing information that may prevent unnecessary litigation, protect those who may have been falsely accused, and assist the courts in the proper adjudication in criminal matters; diagnosing previously unsuspected contagious disease; identifying hazardous environmental conditions in the workplace, in the home, and elsewhere; identifying trends such as rate***

*changes in homicides, motor vehicle fatalities, and drug-related deaths; and identifying new types and forms of drugs appearing in the state, or existing drugs/substances becoming new subjects of abuse.*

*The mission of the Office is accomplished by three departments: Pathology, Laboratory, and Management Services. The OCME 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.*

### **Statutory Responsibility**

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

- 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.

Chapter 368q of the Connecticut General Statutes places OCME under the control and supervision of the Commission on Medicolegal Investigations.

### **Commission membership during fiscal year 2013-2014:**

Chair: Todd Fernow, JD, University of Connecticut, School of Law

Vice Chair: John Sinard, MD, PhD, Professor of Pathology, Yale University, School of Medicine

Sidney Hopfer, PhD, Professor of Pathology, University of Connecticut, School of Medicine

Celia Pinzi, Public Member, West Haven

Steven B. Duke, JD, Professor of Law, Yale University, School of Law

Richard A. Lavelly, MD, JD, MS, MPH, Connecticut Bar Association

Jewel Mullen, MD, MPH, MPA, Commissioner, Department of Public Health

Susan Keane Baker, MHA, Public Member, New Canaan

Isaac Goodrich, MD, Connecticut Medical Society

### **Public Service Improvements**

The chief recipients of our public service are the next-of-kin of the decedents whose deaths fall under our jurisdiction. Our goal is to investigate and certify these deaths in a timely, efficient, and caring manner. The expeditious removal and then release of the remains to the funeral home is part of this process. It is important for timely scene investigation and removal of

remains from scenes so as not to add to the emotional burden of the family. Our examinations should be done as expeditiously as possible in order for the remains to be returned to the family for timely funeral arrangements. For cremation certification, our goal is to conduct a timely and appropriately thorough inquiry into the death.

Our work also involves and/or benefits treating physicians, law enforcement agencies, funeral directors, the legal system, treating, public health agencies, and the general public. The OCME continues its ongoing initiative to improve the quality and delivery of its critical services (please see below for methods of improvement). We gauge our office forensic practice through accreditation by National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) and a variety of office metrics for completion of autopsy reports and length of time for examination completion. Our record's section responded to 4,010 requests for reports and sent out 3,200 reports to various governmental agencies and 1,348 to families, attorneys, and insurance companies.

In addition to normal agency operations, the agency receives and responds to innumerable requests for information from state, municipal and federal agencies, research facilities, and many other organizations who utilize our data. The OCME's information technology (IT) section produced substantial computerized statistical reports during the year including substance abuse and homicide data. Recipients included state's attorneys, several state agencies, public defenders, hospital quality control departments, researchers, and the media. We have participated in grant proposals for the National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) and Suicide investigation and prevention.

Pathology residents (from hospital training programs at Yale, Hartford Hospital, and Danbury Hospital), 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 the OCME. Pathologist's Assistants (master degree candidates) from Quinnipiac University spend a rotation observing and assisting in the performance of autopsies. Educational programs have been provided to law enforcement personnel, medical students at the University of Connecticut and Yale University Schools of Medicine, and to many professional and community groups across the state.

### **Achievements 2013-2014**

The Office underwent its annual accreditation evaluation by the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) and was granted continued full accreditation. The NAME evaluation noted that the "staff should be commended for their dedication to achieving a state of the art medicolegal death investigation system" and the "office clearly has a strong commitment to excellence and professionalism. The State of Connecticut should take pride in the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner." OCME continues its ongoing initiative to continuously improve the quality and delivery of its critical services.

**Laboratory Services:** Faced with an overwhelming backlog of toxicology reports due to staffing and equipment deficiencies, the toxicological analysis was out-sourced to a commercial

laboratory in September 2013. The OCME toxicology laboratory already had been out-sourcing hundreds of samples per year for confirmation testing prior to September. The average turn-around-time for toxicology reports decreased from 139 days (July 2013) to 9 days (January 2014). The toxicology backlog was cleared by January 2014. This improvement in toxicology turn-around-time has allowed the OCME to finalize death certificates and autopsy reports more efficiently (see below) with an added cost-savings benefit.

**Pathology Services:** The turn-around-time for autopsy reports improved in fiscal year 2014. The completion times for the first half of the fiscal year improved to 55% (completed within 60 days) and 70% (within 90 days) from 4% (60 days) and 13% (90 days) in the last half of fiscal 2013. This improvement continued in the second half of fiscal 2014 meeting our goals of 90% completion for both 60 and 90 days. These improvements were due to changes in staffing, toxicology testing, and office procedures.

A private transport service is used as backup support for our mortuary transport team to ensure rapid removal of remains in instances when the primary team is otherwise occupied. The OCME has started a fax-cremation certificate process for select cremations that will make it easier and more expeditious for funeral directors to obtain their cremation certificates.

**Management Services:** Currently, management services (human resources, procurement, etc) are provided by UCHC but will return to the OCME sometime in fiscal year 2015. Health and safety issues are continually addressed with the expected result of a better environment for the employees and protection of evidence. The facility is under the control of the State Department of Public Works and managed by a private company.

### **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 recommended for approval. Additionally, the agency met 78% of its set aside goal for small business contracts, and met 69% of its goal for 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>.

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