

## Fiscal Year 2018-2019

### Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

**James R. Gill, MD**, *Chief Medical Examiner*

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

*Established – 1970. Statutory authority - Conn Gen Statutes Sec. 19a-400-415*

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

*Average number of employees – 50 full-time authorized (47 actual) and 19 part-time*

*Recurring operating expenses (2018-2019):* \$6,357,011

*Capital Equipment Purchase expenses (2018-2019):* \$21,390

*Federal Grants Impact (2018-2019):* \$941,123

*Collected revenue (2018-2019):* \$2,824,015

### Mission

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

- Investigate reported deaths
- 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 unexpected deaths.
- Provide information to legitimate interested parties per 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 be able to release the remains within 24 hours; and complete 90% of OCME reports within sixty days of the investigation.

Medicolegal investigations protect the public by producing accurate vital statistics, providing information that may prevent unnecessary litigation, protect those who may have been falsely accused, and assist the courts in the proper adjudication of criminal matters; diagnosing previously unsuspected contagious disease; identifying hazardous environmental conditions in the workplace, in the home, and elsewhere; identifying trends such as changes in homicidal, motor vehicular, and drug-related death rates; and identify 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 sections: 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.

### Action Items

1. Work with DPH to implement electronic death registration system (EDRS) to replace paper certificates.
2. Implement an electronic payment system for medical records and cremation certificates (“paperless”).
3. Review options for future building renovation.

## **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, unexpected, and suspicious deaths.
- All deaths related to poisoning, drug abuse, or addiction.
- Deaths related to employment or 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.

Chapter 368q of the Connecticut General Statutes places OCME under the control and supervision of the Commission on Medicolegal Investigations whose members are appointed by the Governor.

### **Commission membership during fiscal year 2018-2019:**

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

Michael T. McCormack, JD, Connecticut Bar Association

Commissioner Renée D. Coleman-Mitchell, Commissioner, Department of Public Health

Olinda Morales, JD, Commissioner Renée D. Coleman-Mitchell's Designee

Susan Keane Baker, MHA, Public Member, New Canaan

Michael Krinsky, MD, CT Med Society

The Commission is updating the agency regulations and has implemented a performance appraisal of the Chief and Deputy Chief Medical Examiners.

## **Public Service**

The chief recipients of our public service are the next-of-kin of the decedents who come under our jurisdiction. Our goal is to investigate and certify these deaths in a timely, high quality, efficient, and caring manner. The expeditious removal and then release of the remains to the funeral home is part of this process. Our work also involves and/or benefits treating physicians, law enforcement agencies, funeral directors, the legal system, public health agencies, and the general public. We gauge our forensic practice through accreditation by the 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 medical record's section responded to 5,928 written requests for reports and sent out 3,970 reports to various governmental agencies and 1,304 to families, attorneys, and insurance companies. We have begun a computer-based protocol for handling the documents that we generate and have expedited several processes through the use of this technology.

In addition to normal agency operations, we receive and respond 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 participate in data collection for the National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) and a Department of Defense (MIMIC) grant.

Pathology residents (from hospital training programs at Yale, Hartford Hospital, and Danbury Hospital) and master degree candidates 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 Yale University School of Medicine, physician assistant students from Sacred Heart University, and for many professional and community groups across the state.

### **Improvements/Achievements 2018-2019**

We regained full National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) accreditation on November 12, 2018. On April 12, 2019, we were approved by the ACGME, along with the University of Connecticut School of Medicine Program, to have two forensic pathology fellowship positions at the OCME. As there is a national shortage of forensic pathologists, the Federal Government is offering grants to fund Forensic Pathology fellowship positions. Once funding is secured, we hope to be able to offer the fellowship positions starting in July 2021. We also have participated and received several other grants:

<i><b>Grant</b></i>	<i><b>Category</b></i>	<i><b>\$</b></i>
<i>National Trauma Institute-MIMIC17-5</i>	<i>Wages</i>	<i>\$12,652</i>
<i>National Trauma Institute-MIMIC17-6</i>	<i>Fringe</i>	<i>\$14,168</i>
<i>National Trauma Institute-MIMIC17-7</i>	<i>Goods and Services</i>	<i>\$5,940</i>
<i>Opioid Grant</i>	<i>Goods and Services</i>	<i>\$188,713</i>
<i>2017 Paul Coverdell</i>	<i>Goods and Services</i>	<i>\$7,275</i>
<i>Opioid Surge-Prevention</i>	<i>Wages</i>	<i>\$371,491</i>
<i>Opioid Surge-Prevention</i>	<i>Fringe</i>	<i>\$233,267</i>
<i>Opioid Surge-Prevention</i>	<i>Goods and Services</i>	<i>\$61,357</i>
<i>2018 Paul Coverdell</i>	<i>Goods and Services</i>	<i>\$46,260</i>
<i><b>Total =</b></i>		<i><b><u>\$941,123</u></b></i>

**Laboratory Services:** The NAME accreditation benchmark for toxicology reporting is that 90% or more of toxicology reports must be completed within 90 days to avoid a loss of accreditation. For fiscal year 2018-2019, 99% of the NMS toxicology reports were completed within 30 days; the average NMS toxicology report turn-around time was 12 days. Beginning in August, 2016, toxicology testing on certain cases (homicides, traumatic suicides, and motor vehicle collisions) were sent to the lab of the Connecticut Division of Scientific Services under DESPP. For fiscal year 2018-2019, 45% of the DESPP toxicology reports were completed within 30 days and 100% were completed within 60 days; the average DESPP toxicology report turn-around time was 35 days.

The OCME has a very active Anthropology Laboratory service, under the direction of a part-time, board-certified Forensic Anthropologist. She has been essential to the death investigation of skeletonized remains and unidentified persons.

**Pathology Services:** We have made considerable progress with medical examiner staffing (currently 8 MEs) and our ninth ME is starting in September 2019 which will bring us to full staff. We occasionally use per diem forensic pathologists when needed. Given our current autopsy numbers and drug intoxication deaths (see charts below), this current staffing level is not optimum but should be adequate to maintain full NAME accreditation.

We are actively working with DPH on the electronic death registration system. The implementation of this system will greatly decrease costs both in postal services and in staff time. Funeral homes would not need to come to the office to pick up the death certificate and we would not have to mail amended copies.

**Management Services:** The business office has reduced the outstanding accounts receivable balance while working with agency customers. We hope to add an electronic cremation billing service with the new EDRS system. The facility is under the control of the Department of Administrative Services Bureau of Properties and Facilities Management and managed by a private company. With these collaborative partnerships, the OCME is striving to meet the growing operational demands within the same building structure since 1986. Consideration for renovation will need to be addressed in the near future. Health and safety issues are continually addressed with the expected result of a better environment for the employees and protection of evidence. Our safety committee is highly active and productive.

### **Information Reported as Required by State Statute**

The agency remains committed to the principles of affirmative action and equal employment opportunity. Our affirmative action plan was fully approved by C.H.R.O. Additionally, the OCME met 257% of its set aside goal for certified small business purchases, and met 301% of its goal for certified minority business enterprise purchases. As required by state statute, the agency provides data reports and information to the Office of Policy and Management, Office of Fiscal Analysis, and Office of the State Comptroller on a continuous basis.

Our website is regularly accessed by interested individuals. Please visit our website at <http://www.ct.gov/ocme>.

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