

## *At a Glance*

### **Office of the Chief Medical Examiner**

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

**Edward T. McDonough, MD**, *Deputy Chief Medical Examiner*

*Established - 1970 Statutory authority - Sec. 19a-400 through 19a-414*

**Conn. Gen. Stat.**

*Average number of employees - 53 full-time and 14 part-time*

*Recurring operating expenses, 2001-2002 - \$ 4,706,989*

*Capital outlay - \$ 148,014*

### **Mission**

In Connecticut, all violent, sudden, unexpected and suspicious deaths, deaths related to employment or which constitute a threat to the public health, and deaths of people whose bodies are to be cremated, are reportable to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. 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.

### **Statutory Responsibility**

The Connecticut General Statutes concisely defines what deaths will be investigated. Because of the nature of death, the Office has little control of the number of investigations. During the year 15,031 deaths were reported to the Medical Examiner's Office. After initial investigation, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner took jurisdiction of 12,850 cases for further investigation. Staff investigators and/or Assistant Medical Examiners, serving in communities throughout the state, initially investigates each case. Of the total number of deaths reported, 9,432 were cremation investigations, a decrease of 2.7% from the previous fiscal year. There were 1,619 medicolegal autopsies/examinations conducted at the Farmington facility. Of the autopsies performed at the Chief Medical Examiner's Office, 110 were homicide victims, a slight decrease from the previous fiscal year. Completed records of homicides, including toxicological analysis, were furnished to the state's attorneys, usually within thirty days following autopsy.

The Office, located on the grounds of the University of Connecticut Health Center in Farmington, operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, year round. Our goal is: to investigate deaths presented to this Office in a timely and in a high quality manner; release the body to the family within 24 hours; and complete at least 80% of required reports within thirty days of autopsy.

### **Public Service; Improvements/Achievements 2001-2002; Reducing Waste**

The Office is functionally divided into three parts: Pathology Services; Laboratory Services and Management Services. The Office is geared to delivering services in a timely, efficient, high quality manner, in a cost effective manner. A summary of our improvements/achievements includes: ongoing use of universal precautions (with respect to blood borne disease); health and safety training and simplifying operations. An agency initiated operational review, completed in late 2000, has made significant progress. As a result of the study recommendations, a design team was formed. There were several recommendations including: Re-structure the office organization to more efficiently and effectively deploy staff; organize an employee work team to develop a procedures manual; and to finalize/implement an update to the DOS based death investigation computer system. During this fiscal year, the re-structuring was implemented, the procedures manual initiative is underway and an agreement is in place to implement a contemporary windows based death investigation system that will include legacy data.

Ongoing review of business practices continues to result in small, but important, steps to streamline and simplify office operations. We continue to utilize the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provided by the University of Connecticut Health Center.

During this period, the facility was 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.

Connecticut has one of the largest databases of accumulated death investigation data in the country (over 170,000 records). The office produced substantial computerized statistical reports during the year. Recipients include state's attorneys, public defenders, hospital quality control departments and researchers. The Office continues its migration to automate processes to reduce repetitive manual entry to increase service response. Our website continues to be regularly accessed by interested individuals. Please visit our website at <http://www.state.ct.us/ocme>.

In the toxicology and histology laboratories, we continue to invest in technological advances to more efficiently and effectively detect increasingly complex post mortem testing of tissue and fluids.

Six pathology residents from three hospital training programs in Connecticut and three medical students from the University of Connecticut Health Center spent an elective rotation at the Chief Medical Examiner's Office. Thirteen pathology master degree candidates from Quinnipiac College, one intern from Fitchburg, MA Forensic Nursing program and one student from the Yokohama Medical School, Japan, spent a rotation observing and assisting in the performance of autopsies during this period.

An average of fifteen residents from several hospital pathology programs statewide participated in our forensic pathology seminar during 2001-2002. 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.

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner continues its ongoing initiative to continuously improve the quality and delivery of its critical services in a timely, efficient and caring manner, and is committed to the letter and spirit of equal opportunity and affirmative action for all.

The Chapter 368q of the Connecticut General Statutes places the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner under the supervision of the Commission on Medicolegal Investigations. The commission met at the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in Farmington on September 28 and November 16, 2001 and on January 18, March 22 and May 31, 2002. The March 22, 2002 meeting was the annual open meeting at which member of constituent groups and representatives of the public are invited to address the Commission.

Commission membership during fiscal year 2001-2002: Joxel Garcia, Commissioner, Department of Public Health, Hartford; Robert E. Cone, Ph.D., Professor of Pathology, University of Connecticut Health Center, Farmington; Francis R. Coughlin, M.D., JD, Physician and Attorney, New Canaan; Steve Evans Downing, M.D., Professor of Pathology, Yale University School of Medicine, New Haven; Steven B. Duke, JD, Professor of Law, Yale University School of Law; New Haven; Todd Fernow, JD, University of Connecticut Law School, Hartford; Susan Keane Baker, MHA, public member, Glastonbury; Daniel C. Niejadlik, M.D., Physician, Essex; Richard A. Lavelly, M.D., JD,MS, MPH, Connecticut Bar Association. Dr. Downing was re-elected to continue serving as chairman.

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