
MEDICAL EXAMINER ACTIVITY

The staff members of the Medical Examiner's Office are involved in a wide variety of activities commensurate with the mission of the office including responding to and investigating the scene of death, performing postmortem examinations, certifying the cause and manner of death, and providing information and assistance to families. Investigators, who are familiar with the emotional trauma of an unexpected death, communicate directly with the family as do the Medical Examiner pathologists, who review their findings with the families in order to clarify the many questions that accompany a sudden loss of life. The office also provides referrals to grief support services.

In all cases investigated by the Medical Examiner, it is essential that the decedent's identity is established and the next-of-kin is located and notified regarding the death. In addition, property belonging to the decedent must be controlled and released according to legal requirements. In most cases these issues are resolved expeditiously. In certain cases, identification requires additional effort in locating dental, medical or police records. Some individuals may have died leaving no next-of-kin or next-of-kin far removed. Ensuring that all leads have been exhausted in pursuit of next-of-kin can be a very time consuming but ultimately rewarding effort.

The postmortem examination on each decedent includes the preservation of various body fluids and tissues for microscopic and toxicologic analysis. Photographs are taken of the external and internal portions of the examination, which are available for review at a later date if needed. Photographic documentation is also an essential item in those cases where the pathologist must provide court testimony. Forensic anthropology is another important activity necessary to resolve skeletal cases and difficult identification issues.

Medical Examiner pathologists and investigators provide testimony in court and at depositions. Staff participates in meetings with police, medical professionals, and attorneys. A recent addition to the duties of the Chief Medical Examiner is expert medical consultation and testimony in cases involving nonfatal domestic violence assaults.

Autopsy reports and related data from individual investigations are provided to law enforcement agencies, to prosecuting attorneys and to many other agencies including Labor and Industries, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Drug-related deaths are reported to the Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN), a national public health surveillance system that monitors drug trends.

Medical Examiner investigations require frequent contact between the Medical Examiner's Office and various media personnel. Staff members are skilled in responding to the media inquiries that occur daily. The Medical Examiner pathologists and other staff participate in a variety of medical conferences, and provide information on a regular basis to law enforcement and to medical personnel on various aspects regarding the role and function of the Medical Examiner's Office.

The data collected and presented in this and other Medical Examiner annual reports also provide baseline information for further analysis. Medical Examiner staff analyzes data to study relevant death investigation topics that have applications in such fields as law enforcement, medicine, law, social sciences, and injury prevention. Examples include infant mortality, teenage suicide, child abuse, law enforcement restraint, investigation of vehicular traffic accidents, and investigation of therapeutic complication deaths. In addition, the office participates in teaching medical students, pathology residents, emergency medical service, and law enforcement personnel.

In 2006, staff participated as speakers at universities, conferences, and training seminars for law enforcement, medical, legal, and social service personnel in the following presentations and lectures:

Richard C. Harruff, MD, PhD, Chief Medical Examiner

Academic Appointment:

- Clinical Associate Professor, Department of Pathology, University of Washington School of Medicine

Associations, Committees and Boards:

- Advisory Board, University of Washington Certificate Program in Forensics
- Community Advisory Board, University of Washington School of Nursing, Advanced Practice Forensic Nurse Specialist Program
- King County Child Death Review Committee
- King County Elder Abuse Council
- Member, Disaster Mortuary Operations Response Team, Region 10
- Member, American Academy of Forensic Sciences
 - Best Resident Paper Award Committee
- Member, National Association of Medical Examiners
 - International Relationships Ad hoc Committee
 - Forensic Pathology Fellowship Training Subcommittee
- Member, Washington Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners
- Member, American Medical Association
- Member, Washington State Medical Association

Preceptorships:

- University of Washington School of Medicine, medical students and pathology residents.
- University of Washington School of Nursing, graduate students in Forensic Nursing.

Professional Meetings:

- National Association of Medical Examiners, Interim Meeting, Seattle, WA, February 21.
- National Association of Medical Examiners, Annual Meeting, San Antonio, TX, October 13-18.

Trainings and Certifications:

- ICS 100, 200 and 700 National Incident Management System Certification, Emergency Management Institute, Federal Emergency Management Agency, September 7, 21; December 27.
- Security and Health Information Privacy Training, Public Health – Seattle & King County, March.

Award:

- Take Action Award Recipient, Seventh Annual Take Action Against Domestic Violence Awards Reception, King County Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Seattle City Hall, October 26.

Scientific Presentations:

- Pathology of environmental and occupational toxic exposures. Workshop: Forensic Toxicology – The World Outside of Drugs. American Academy of Forensic Sciences Annual Meeting, Seattle, WA, February 20-25.
- Necrotizing fasciitis: manifestations, microbiology and connection with black tar heroin. Dunbar NM, Wigren C, Harruff RC, American Academy of Forensic Sciences Annual Meeting, Seattle, WA, February 20-25.
- Measuring misuse of prescription-type opiates: implications for public health. Banta-Green C, Merrill J, Logan B, Harruff RC, Gordon AM. American Public Health Association, 134th Annual Meeting and Exposition, Boston, MA, November 7.
- Intestinal perforations and volvulus in a young child due to swallowed toy magnets. Harruff RC. National Association of Medical Examiners Annual Meeting, San Antonio, TX, October 13-18.

Local and Regional Educational Presentations:

- Automobile Accident Reconstruction
Certificate Program in Forensics, University of Washington
Seattle, WA April 10
- Infant Deaths
Certificate Program in Forensics, University of Washington
Seattle, WA April 10
- Basic Death Investigation

Forensics Sciences Course
Seattle University
Seattle, WA April 13

- Pattern Injuries and Strangulation
Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE) Core Training
University of Washington
Seattle, WA April 26
- Child Abuse & Neglect, Homicide, and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome
14th Annual Children's Justice Conference
Washington State Convention and Trade Center
Seattle, WA May 1-2
- Investigation of Sudden Unexpected Infant Death
Co-presented with Dr. Kathy Taylor
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Seattle, WA, August 24
- Investigation of Traffic Fatalities
Medicolegal Death Investigator Training
Olympia, WA December 4
- Investigation of Infant Deaths
Medicolegal Death Investigator Training
Olympia, WA December 4

J. Matthew Lacy, MD, Associate Medical Examiner

Associations, Committees and Boards:

- Associate Member, American Academy of Forensic Scientists
- Fellow, College of American Pathologists
- Member, National Association of Medical Examiners
- Member, Washington Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners

Preceptorships:

- Clinical Instructor, Department of Pathology, University of Washington School of Medicine

Publications:

- *Fatal Delayed Posthypoxic Demyelination, An Unsuccessful Trial of Immunomodulatory Therapy.*
Khot S, Walker M, Lacy JM, Oakes P, Longstreth WT. *Neurocritical Care.* 2006; 6:1-4.

Local and Regional Educational Presentations:

- Medical Examiner Testimony
Franklin High School Mock Trial Team
King County Medical Examiner's Office
Seattle, WA January 12

- Opiate Related Deaths in King County
Chronic Pain Management – CME Clinical Course
Public Health Seattle & King County
Renton Community Center
Renton, WA January 24

- Small Cell Carcinoma of the Lung Contributing to Pulmonary Barotrauma with Air Embolism in a Recreational Diver: A Case Report and Review of the Literature
Poster Presentation, American Academy of Forensic Sciences Annual Meeting
Convention Center
Seattle, WA February 20

- Moderator, Best Resident Paper section
American Academy of Forensic Sciences Annual Meeting
Convention Center
Seattle, WA February 23

- Death Certification of Deaths in Custody
King County Medical Examiner's Advisory Committee
Seattle Police Training Facility
Seattle, WA March 21

- Natural Deaths
University of Washington Extension Program in Forensics
UW Campus
Seattle, WA April 10

- Drug Related Deaths in King County
King County Medical Examiner's Advisory Committee
Seattle Police Training Facility
Seattle, WA May 16

- The Medical Examiner and Public Health: Forensic Pathology in Service of the Living.
Grand Rounds, MEDEX Physician Assistant Program, University of Washington
UW Campus
Seattle, WA October 31

- Seattle Police Department TASER Instructor Training
Physician Observer/Commentator
SPD Training Facility
Seattle, WA December 14

Katherine Taylor, Ph.D., Forensic Anthropologist

Associations, Committees and Boards:

- Member, Missing Persons Task Force. Washington Association of Counties
- Board Member, SIDS Foundation of Washington
- Board Member, Department of Criminal Justice Advisory Board, Seattle University
- Member, American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators
- Fellow, American Academy of Forensic Sciences

Presentations:

- A Career in Forensics
Panel Member for University of Washington Career Day
University of Washington
Seattle, WA, January 23
- Mass Fatality Response
University of Washington Emergency Management
University of Washington
Seattle, WA, January 26
- Outdoor Crime Scenes
Mason County Search & Rescue
Shelton, WA, March 30
- Forensic Anthropology
Annual Conference, American Society of Clinical Laboratory Specialists
Edmonds, WA, April 22
- Processing Outdoor Crime Scenes
Co-presented with the King County Sheriff's Office
Flathead County Search & Rescue
Missoula, MT, May 13 - 14
- Determination of Human versus Non-Human / Outdoor Crime Scenes
Washington State Search & Rescue Conference
Enumclaw, WA, May 19 - 20
- Equipment needed for a Mass Fatality Response
Multidisciplinary Equipment Purchasing Group
Renton, WA, June 4
- Instructor, Buried Body School for Law Enforcement
Lane County Sheriff's Office
Eugene, OR, August 14 - 16
- Processing Outdoor Crime Scenes
Co-presented with the King County Sheriff's Office
Kootenai County Search & Rescue
Coeur d' Alene, ID August 18 - 19
- Investigation of Sudden Unexpected Infant Death
Co-presented with Chief Medical Examiner, Dr. Richard Harruff

Federal Bureau of Investigation
Seattle, WA August 24

- Identifying the Unidentified
Washington Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners
Missing and Unidentified Persons Meeting
Wenatchee, WA October 5 – 6

Greg Hewett, Mdiv, Program Manager IV

Association & Committees:

- Member, Seattle University Advisory Committee, Criminal Justice Program
- Member, Washington Association of Coroners & Medical Examiners
- Washington State Registered Counselor

Presentations:

- Role & Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner's Office
Seattle Police Department Explorer Post # 943
Seattle, WA, April 17

Alfred Noriega, Lead Forensic Medical Investigator

Association & Committees:

- Diplomate, American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators
- Member, Washington Association of Coroners & Medical Examiners
- Member, Seattle University Advisory Committee, Criminal Justice Program

Presentations:

- Basic Forensic Death Investigation for Law Enforcement
Washington State Criminal Justice Training Academy, Class # 590
Burien, WA, February 22
- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner
King County Sheriff's Office, Ten Print Unit
Seattle, WA, March 22
- Death Investigation, Responsibility of the Seattle Police Department and the KCMEO
Co-presented with Detective Suzanne Moore, Seattle Police Department
Quality Improvement Forum for Licensees/Providers of Adult Family Homes
Washington State Department of Human Health Services / Residential Care Services Region 4
Seattle, WA, April 6
- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner's Office
Seattle Police Department Explorer Post 943

Seattle, WA, April 17

- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner's Office
Mercer Island High School Career Day
King County Medical Examiners Office
Mercer Island, WA, May 22

Nathan Geerdes, BA Psychology, Medicolegal Death Investigator

Associations:

- Diplomate, American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators
- Member, Washington Association of Coroners & Medical Examiners

Presentations:

- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner's Office
Seattle University
Seattle, WA, January 18
- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner's Office
Seattle University
Seattle, WA, January 25
- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner's Office
Seattle University
Seattle, WA, April 12
- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner's Office
Seattle University
Seattle, WA, April 19

Barry Peterson, Forensic Autopsy Technician

Associations:

- Member, Washington Association of Coroners & Medical Examiners

Presentations:

- Autopsy Procedures & Collection of Evidence at the KCMEO
Seattle Police Department Training Annex
Seattle, WA January 24

Table 12-1 **Weekly Variation of Deaths Investigated by the King County Medical Examiner's Office**

	TOTAL
Number of weeks studied	52
Mean number of cases assumed	39
Maximum in any one week	53
Minimum in any one week	29

Table 12-2 **Weekly Variation of Autopsies Performed by the King County Medical Examiner's Office**

	TOTAL
Number of weeks studied	52
Mean number of autopsies	27
Maximum in any one week	49
Minimum in any one week	16

Organization of the King County Medical Examiner's Office 2006

