

OSCME NEWSLETTER

VRISM Update

On September 25, all funeral homes in Tennessee began to use the electronic death registration system to file death certificates with the state Office of Vital Records. Currently, the goal of the Office of Vital Records is to provide all physicians with the ability to use this system effective November 1, 2017. This will eliminate the need for a funeral home to bring a paper certificate to the medical certifier, will allow family members to obtain certified copies from any county health department rather than having to use the central office in Nashville, and most importantly should improve the quality and timeliness of our death statistics. Use of the system will assure a quicker turn-around time and will allow medical certifiers to electronically complete death certificates from any computer with internet access.

In general, cases will be assigned to you by a funeral home, which will enter demographic information, just as the system works now. After you complete the sections for cause and manner of death, you will electronically certify the record. The record then becomes available for the return to the funeral home to be registered with the state. The medical examiner role does allow you to initiate a record and to register a completed death certificate, if necessary.

A user agreement form is available online at <https://tn.gov/health/>

[article/vr-vrism](#). Be sure to write somewhere on this form that you are registering as the county medical examiner, and what county/counties you serve. If you plan to have an assistant enter demographic information into the system, he or she should specify on the user agreement that the role of Facility Data Clerk should be assigned to him or her.



The Delayed Diagnosis of Death can be electronically filed for records which were originally electronically certified as "Pending". If the original death certificate was classified as "Pending" on paper, a paper Delayed Diagnosis of Death will be needed to complete the case.

As of this writing, cremation permits will continue to be processed on paper as you are currently doing. Please note that physicians who are not county medical examiners will only be allowed to certify manners of death as "Natural" or "Pending", pursuant

to Tenn. Code Ann. § 68-3-502. Power Point presentations regarding death certification in general and certification of drug-related deaths are available on the OSCME website under "Resources for the County Medical Examiner".

As always, our staff will be happy to help you with questions about the medical certification of death at 1-844-860-4511/Health.OSCME@tn.gov.

Welcome Aboard – New County Medical Examiners Appointed in the Last Year:

Decatur County – Dr. Christopher Marshall, MD, family medicine doctor in Parsons, Tennessee.

Jefferson County – Dr. Mark Holland, MD is an internal medicine doctor who practices in Rutledge, TN. Dr. Holland also serves as the CME for Grainger and Union counties.

Lawrence County – Dr. Micky Busby, MD is an internal medicine doctor who practices in Lawrenceburg.

Van Buren County – Dr. Ty Webb, MD is a family medicine doctor in Van Buren and White Counties.

Warren County – Dr. Robert Sabo, MD is a nephrology doctor who practices in McMinnville, TN.

If we have missed any new medical examiners please let us know and we will update your contact information.

The OSCME website (<https://www.tn.gov/health/section/OSCME>) was recently updated to include a fillable cremation permit, a request for medical records template, and training and continuing education event schedule.

INFORMATION

Investigating Delayed Deaths

Any death due to non-natural causes, regardless of the time elapsed between the injury and the death, should be reported to and investigated by the county medical examiner/investigator (CME/I) of the county in which death occurred. If a death is related in any way to a discrete injury or poisoning event, the period of time between the non-natural event and the death is irrelevant. It is important that the CME/I make an investigation into the circumstances of the delayed death and to properly determine and certify the cause and manner of death.

Delayed death cases are frequently not reported to the CME/I, this can result from lack of documentation of the injury event, geographic and jurisdictional difference between place of injury and death, or length of time between the injury event and death. The CME/I should work with hospitals and nursing homes in their jurisdiction and provide them information on when to report delayed deaths to the medical examiner. The OSCME developed a flyer "Deaths Which Must Be Reported to the County Medical Examiner" for this purpose; it is available on our website.

Common examples of delayed deaths include:

- An elderly person dies as the result of a gradual decline in health following a hip fracture;
- A person who dies of urosepsis due to paraplegia following a car crash years before;
- A person who develops pneumonia as the result of anoxic brain injury after a drug overdose.

If the person in the example above died of urosepsis due to paraplegia from a GSW of the spinal cord after being shot by another 10 years ago, the manner would be homicide, to catch these types of cases it is important to investigate the circumstances of all deaths reported to the CME/I.

In order to properly certify these deaths the medical examiner must show a link between the injury and death. A good rule of thumb is to ask oneself, "Did this person return to their pre-injury level of function prior to death?" If the answer is no, the manner of death most likely cannot be considered natural. In these instances, the CME can decline to order an autopsy or even take custody of the body. However the CME should ensure that the death certificate is appropriately certified as an accident, suicide, or homicide.

Missing Person Day Events

Dates and locations of remaining events are:

Jackson – October 12, 2017 – 11 am to 3 pm – Jackson-Madison County Health Department, 804 North Parkway, Jackson, TN

Nashville – October 13, 2017 – 11 am to 3 pm – Lentz Public Health Center, 2500 Charlotte Avenue, Nashville, TN

Chattanooga – November 4, 2017 – 11 am to 3 pm - Hamilton County Courts Building, 600 Market Street; Chattanooga, TN

Memphis – November 18, 2017 – 11am to 3 pm – First Congregational Church, 1000 Cooper Street, Memphis, TN

If you would like to sponsor an event in your jurisdiction and you would like the OSCME to assist with coordination or staffing please contact our office at 1-844-860-4511 or 1-615-837-5037.

The final version of the Help Find the Missing Act (HB0044 / SB0113) can be found on the OSCME website at <https://www.tn.gov/health/section/OSCME>. Click on the left hand tab "2017 Legislative Updates."

For more information on NamUS and to learn about registering as a user go to <https://namus.gov> or contact Amy Dobbs, Regional Systems Administrator, at amy.dobbs@unthsc.edu.



MEDICAL EXAMINER SPOTLIGHT

Meet your Fellow County Medical Examiner: Don Hardison, M.D. McMinn County



Describe your background:

I graduated from the UT Memphis medical school in 1964 and went to work in the ER before the specialty of emergency medicine existed. I became board certified in EM in 1982. After retiring from 22 years as a physician in the USAF I ended up in practice in the ER in Athens, TN. I have been married for 44 years as of September 22nd to a terrific lady.

How long have you been county medical examiner?

When Dr. Foree retired, about 6 - 7 years ago, I was drafted by the county mayor to take over the ME duties. Age and arthritis have slowed me down, and after resigning twice (neither of which the mayor accepted) our county finally agreed to set up an investigator program. I was incredibly fortunate to have two experienced emergency room nurses who stepped up and took on the investigator role.

How did you get interested in the medical examiner office?

I had the good fortune during pathology courses in my second year of medical school at UT Memphis to

attend presentations and autopsies by Dr. Jerry Francisco, one of the pioneers in the forensic path arena. Did a surgery residency, rotated through pathology and I found the forensics in EM fascinating. I bought my first text on "Medicolegal Investigation of Death" by Spitz and Fisher in 1973. During the years I have attended every CME course on forensic medicine that I could find (there were precious few) and when in Athens I befriended the county ME Dr. Bill Foree (a urologist). I started helping Dr. Foree take call when he had to be out of town or had an unbearable case load. I read the original ME Handbook and continued to read everything I could get my hands on about forensic emergency medicine and the medical examiner's role.

What do you feel is the biggest obstacle in performing your duties?

I have found that almost everyone assumes that the rural county ME is just like all the TV show and of course we all know real life is totally different. I am frustrated by those who do not understand what an ME and autopsy can and cannot do to answer their questions. My top aggravation is in about 75% of the death by accidental overdose cases, the family is adamant that someone must have murdered their friend or relative. Their insistence can go on for years.

The real pleasures of the job are in working with the law enforcement folks. My local sheriff's department is incredibly supportive of my work, and they make me feel not only like a part of the team but that they value my work. I find it easy to work with our city law enforcement folks and with the THP on vehicular deaths. And if I didn't have Dr. Mileusnic and her associates for support, I couldn't do my job. Their patience and assistance are remarkable.

What is your opinion of the ongoing efforts of the OSCME?

After Dr. Levy departed the state chief medical examiner position we had essentially no state support, and the previous CME seemed to be completely clueless about the resources, training, and capabilities of the rural MEs. Dr. Goodin seems to be turning the system around, and the production of the County Examiner Handbook seems to clearly indicate that she does know what problems we face out here in the weeds.

I think we need two "distance learning" programs: I think someone needs to put together a training program for new county medical examiners: NONE of us have the time to take a week off from practice to attend any of the formal courses. But a program on a set of CDs that we could review at our leisure could make all the difference in how we approach this job (and in recruitment). And the corollary, we need a similar course specifically for those nurses, PAs, EMTs, and others who are interested in becoming investigators. And we need to give certification of some sort to those who complete those courses. And how about an interesting case program, where we can share problems/solutions on a monthly basis, and even perhaps get CME credit.

What is one random fact about yourself that you would not mind being published?

What random fact "that I wouldn't mind being published" -- I wrote this whole thing with the fear that you'd publish it. If the intent was to find something unique about me, I'm just like all the rest of the rural MEs in Tennessee (and across the country), trying to do a community service job with virtually no resources.

RESOURCES

Arranging for Cross Coverage

As the medical examiner, you perform an important service for your county. Investigating deaths in a timely fashion allows families and funeral homes to proceed with funeral arrangements and final disposition. Also, the timely issuance of death certificates and cremation permits allows families to settle estates and make final arrangements for their loved ones without undue delays or additional distress during an already difficult time. But, what happens when you go on that much-deserved vacation, or are otherwise unavailable to fulfill your duties? Each of you should appoint at least one other physician (with their consent) as deputy medical examiner to serve in your absence. Many county medical examiners arrange cross-coverage with other county medical examiners in their area, rather than asking a physician unfamiliar with the responsibilities of the role to assume these duties.

Please notify our office of the appointment of any deputy medical examiners. We will relay the information to the Office of Vital Records to ensure that your deputy will be able to approve cremation permits and electronically certify non-natural deaths in your county. If your deputy is unfamiliar with the role of county medical examiner, please share the OSCME website and contact information for our office so that he or she will be able to easily access the County Medical Examiner Handbook, important forms, and other resources. <https://tn.gov/health/topic/resources-for-the-county-medical-examiner> OSCME Hotline: 1-844-860-4511.

Bats, Clubs, Knives, and Murder...or Not?

The OSCME staff will be traveling to and providing training for all County Medical Examiners and Death Investigators in two full day training sessions regarding death investigation. Topics include post-mortem changes, blunt force trauma, sharp force trauma, photography, and patterned injuries. The course will be approved for EMS, ABMDI, POST, and CME Credits. Locations, dates, and registration links:

Paris Landing – November 8 & 9, 2017

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/bats-clubs-knives-and-murderor-not-tickets-37840182003>

Fall Creek Falls – December 7 & 8, 2017

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/bats-clubs-knives-and-murderor-not-tickets-37841762731>

Pickwick Landing – January 10 & 11, 2018

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/bats-clubs-knives-and-murderor-not-tickets-37842028526>

Montgomery Bell – March 12 & 13, 2018

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/bats-clubs-knives-and-murderor-not-tickets-37844793797>

McMinn County – April 19 & 20, 2018

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/bats-clubs-knives-and-murderor-not-tickets-37845054577>

Cove Lake – May 2 & 3, 2018

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/bats-clubs-knives-and-murderor-not-tickets-37847633290>