

OSCME NEWSLETTER

New Medical Examiner Advisory Council Holds First Meeting in December 2017 and Elects New Chair

During the 2017 legislative session Tennessee Code Annotated §38-7-201 was amended, changing the responsibilities of the Medical Examiner Advisory Council, increasing representation from regional forensic centers and adding a county mayor. The new council has 15 members, two ex officio and 13 appointed by the Governor at the end of November. Dr. Julia Goodin, who served as the previous chair arranged and presided over the first meeting, which was held in Nashville on December 7th. Ten members were present in person and five members attended telephonically. The inaugural meeting included a short presentation on the progress made by the Office of the State Chief Medical Examiner, a review of the rules for the council, new responsibilities of the council, and a new chair was elected. After a unanimous vote in her favor, Dr. Darinka Mileusnic-Polchan, Chief Medical Examiner of Knox and Anderson Counties and representing the Knox Regional Forensic Center, accepted the position. Dr. Mileusnic-Polchan presided over the remainder of the meeting gathering topics for discussion during the next meeting and setting dates for four meetings to be held during 2018, the first of which will be held at 1:00 pm on the 12th of January.

As per Tennessee Code Annotated §38-7-201, the new members were all appointed by the Governor for a three year term and can serve for a maximum of two consecutive terms. If a member is absent from more than half of the meetings in any calendar year without good cause, then a vacancy is created and a new

member appointed by the Governor. Meetings are to be held quarterly and members may participate electronically.

The council has the power and duty to:

- Review candidates and make recommendations to the commissioner of health on the appointment of the chief medical examiner and deputy state medical examiners;

- Assist the chief medical examiner in the development and updating of guidelines for death investigations and forensic autopsies to be promulgated as rules through the department of health;

- Submit an annual report on the standards and guidelines of the medical examiner system to the chairs of the health committee of the House of Representatives and the health and welfare committee of the Senate;

- Periodically review standards and guidelines promulgated by the department of health for the medical examiner system; and

- Provide reports and recommendations to the commissioner on causes of death which may need public health intervention, funding issues, information technology needs and other issues as the council see fit.

Members of the council:

Robert (Bob) Batson, Executive Director, TN Funeral Directors' Association

Jake Bynum, Weakley County Mayor

Dr. David Darden, Polk County Medical Examiner, East Grand Division

Dr. Tony Emison, Crockett and Madison County Medical Examiner, West Grand Division

Dr. Benjamin Figura, Administrator, West Regional Forensic Center

Dr. Feng Li, Chief Medical Examiner, Middle TN Regional Forensic Center

Dr. Lorraine (Lori) MacDonald, Rutherford County Medical Examiner, Middle Grand Division

Dr. James Metcalfe, Chief Medical Examiner, Hamilton County Regional Forensic Center

Dr. Darinka Mileusnic-Polchan, Chief Medical Examiner, Knox County Regional Forensic Center

Edward Miller, District Public Defender, 4th Judicial District

Dr. Marco Ross, Acting Chief Medical Examiner, West Tennessee Regional Forensic Center

Dr. Hunt Scheuerman, Chief Medical Examiner, William L. Jenkins Regional Forensic Center

General Amy Weirich, District Attorney General for the 30th Judicial District, Shelby County

Ex officio voting members:

Mark Gwyn, Director, Criminal Investigation Division of Tennessee Bureau of Investigations

Dr. Julia Goodin, State Chief Medical Examiner

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

INFORMATION

Electronic Death Certification Update

The Office of Vital Records has made significant progress in the implementation of the new statewide electronic death registration system. The Vital Records Information System Management (VRISM) has been in use since September 2017 by all funeral homes in Tennessee for electronic submission of death certificates and has allowed families easier and timelier access to these documents, which must be completed before a body may be cremated or buried and are critical in settling estates. At this writing, approximately one-third of all Tennessee death certificates are being certified and submitted completely electronically. Physicians who have already been using the system report that it allows them to complete certificates on their own schedule, is user-friendly and better serves their patients' families. In addition, the use of electronic death registration systems improves the quality of mortality data, which in turn is used to direct public health efforts, research and funding. Approximately 48 states have established electronic death registration systems.

By June 30, 2018, only electronic death certificates will be accepted by the Office of Vital Records pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated 68-3-103 *et seq.* Registering and beginning to use the system now will provide you, the medical certifier, with the best and most efficient customer service from the Office of Vital Records. Multiple training formats, including on-line webinars and face-to-face interactive sessions, are available and may be scheduled at times most convenient to you.

A user agreement form, frequently asked questions and user manuals are available at <https://www.tn.gov/health/health-program-areas/vital-records/vrism.html>. The Office of the Chief State Medical Examiner has personnel who have been trained to use the system and can help answer questions county medical examiners have about using the system or can

help when you are having difficulty entering a death. Call our toll free number: 844-860-4511.

Apparent Natural Deaths At Home

Natural deaths make up the majority of deaths reported to most medical examiner offices. A natural death is a death caused exclusively (100%) by disease or age. If trauma, injury or environmental factors contribute toward the death in any way the manner of death cannot be classified as natural.

The investigation of a natural death is necessary to determine cause and manner of death and accurate completion of the death certificate. In these cases priority of the scene investigation is to confirm that the death is really natural. The CME/I should collect information to determine whether the death meets medical examiner jurisdiction and if so, whether an autopsy is warranted.

The scene investigation should focus on confirmation of identification, examination of the body and the collection of the decedent's medical, social and family history.

Natural death investigations should consider the following:

- Was the death witnessed or unwitnessed?
- Is there any trauma to the body?
- If at home, was the residence secure? Are there signs of forced entry?
- What was the decedent doing at the time of death?
- Are there any potential dangers (potential electrical contacts, etc.) in the vicinity?
- Is there significant family or medical history? If so, what is that history?
- Are the medications present with the decedent appropriate in numbers for the prescribed dosage? For whom are the medications prescribed?
- Did the decedent recently complain about any pain or illness?
- Is there a history of domestic violence?
- Is the body decomposed? If so, autopsy may be necessary to confirm identification

of decedent.

If an individual is found deceased outside of a health-care setting (e.g., home, yard, etc.), then that individual's death is deemed to have been "unattended." The death should be reported to the medical examiner and a medical examiner or investigator should respond to the scene, perform an investigation and complete the investigative form or ROI. Remember, the point of investigating apparent natural deaths is to confirm the death is indeed natural. The subsequent investigation will determine whether an autopsy is required. The death certificate should be completed by the physician responsible for the patient's care or if the decedent was not under the care of a physician then by the county medical examiner.

Call for Reports

Death investigation can take many forms depending on the protocols set by a county medical examiner, and the resources and staff available to provide such investigations. Therefore, reporting by the county medical examiners of deaths that are reported to them also may be in many forms. The Office of the State Chief Medical Examiner (OSCME) under T.C.A. § 38-7-102 is charged with keeping full and complete records of all reports on investigations and examinations reported to the county medical examiners under the Post-Mortem Examination Act. The state medical examiner is currently collecting all reports of deaths investigated by county medical examiners for deaths that occur in their counties with a plan to publish the first annual medical examiner's report to include all deaths reported in 2017.

The OSCME would like all counties and county medical examiners to be represented in the annual report. To that end, the OSCME is requesting that whatever report is generated by you or those who serve as your county medical examiner investigators be forwarded to the OSCME through whatever method you prefer.

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MEDICAL EXAMINER SPOTLIGHT

Meet Your Fellow County Medical Examiner: Joey Hensley, MD Lewis County Medical Examiner



Joey Hensley MD
Lewis County Medical Examiner
State Senator District 28

Describe your background:

I always wanted to be a doctor even though nobody else in my family was in the medical profession. I grew up in Hohenwald, Tennessee where I practice now. It is the only town in Lewis County and there is no longer a hospital in the county. I received my Associates Degree from Columbia State Community College, my Bachelor's Degree from Memphis State University and my Medical Degree from the University of Tennessee at Memphis. I did my Family Practice Residency at St. Francis Hospital in Memphis. As soon as I finished my residency I returned to Hohenwald and started a solo family practice clinic and I

am still there in the same place 31 years later. I wanted to come back to my hometown and practice and take care of the community. I see all types of patients from newborns to the elderly. I delivered babies for the first five years of my practice but no longer do that because the local hospital closed and I take care of patients in the nursing home. I am blessed to have a wonderful heritage and parents that were the best that anyone could ever have and they instilled in me the values that helped me to achieve the things that I have in life. I served 12 years on the Lewis County School Board and four years on the Lewis County Commission. I served ten years in the Tennessee House of Representatives representing Lewis, Lawrence and part of Wayne counties. I am now in my second term in the Tennessee State Senate representing Maury, Lawrence, Giles, Wayne, Lewis and Perry counties. I continue to work in my medical clinic and I have a nurse practitioner that helps me. I have a wonderful, dedicated staff that makes it possible for me to continue to practice medicine while I serve in the Tennessee General Assembly.

How long have you been county medical examiner?

I have been the Lewis County Medical Examiner for 21 years. I wanted to give back to my community and that is why I serve as the medical examiner for Lewis County. It is an unpaid position that I have never received any compensation for, but I am glad to be able to provide the service for my community.

How did you get interested in the medical examiner office?

I became medical examiner after the former one retired because I wanted to serve and I am the only doctor that lives and practices in Lewis County. I work closely with the local law enforcement and "coroner" Lori Stewart, a local chiropractor, who assists me with death investigations.

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

The biggest obstacle is the time involved in being medical examiner and still working in my practice and being out of town on occasion. Thankfully Lewis County does not have many deaths and most are from natural causes. Also keeping up with new requirements and regulations can be difficult.

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

The ongoing effort of the state medical examiner to improve the consistency of death investigation between the counties is good. There does need to be increased training for county medical examiners to keep everybody up to date on the latest procedures, keeping in mind that most medical examiners in rural counties do it to provide a service and still have other areas of responsibility so it is hard for them to be able to devote much extra time for training. We all want to do the best job we can do and provide the needed services for our communities.

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

I love to fly in my airplane and ride my motorcycle. I grew up working on motorcycles in my father's Honda shop and still love to ride them.

RESOURCES

Death Investigation 101 – Not Just the Basics . . .

The OSCME hosted five DI 101 classes in 2017 in Macon, Putnam, Marshall, Coffee and Montgomery counties and had great attendance and participation. These trainings are held primarily for CME and CMEI personnel and include lectures on death scene investigation, forensic photography, death certification and updates on the Tennessee medical examiner system. In addition attendees participate in two mock scene investigations where they can practice investigating a scene, taking photographs and performing a body examination. These sessions provide an opportunity for attendees to meet and network with other county medical examiners and investigators in nearby counties. Five and three-quarters (5.75) hours AMA PRA Category One Credits, eight hours EMS and eight hours POST continuing education credits are available for the day long course.

The next DI 101 is scheduled for March 7th, 2018 in Sumner County, 18th Judicial District. All CMEs and CME-Is within this judicial district or nearby counties are welcome to register. Registration can be found at:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/death-investigation-101-not-just-the-basics-tickets-41576663921>

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

The Office of the State Chief Medical Examiner in conjunction with Dr. Hugh Berryman and Mitzi Dunkley of Middle Tennessee State University will continue to host the two full-day training sessions on an integrated approach to death investigation. The topics for this year's training include post-mortem changes, blunt force trauma, sharp force trauma, scene photography and patterned injuries. In addition to lectures attendees work in groups through a virtual scene and present their findings and case report to a panel. The class is funded under an agreement with the State of Tennessee, Department of Finance and Administration, Office of Criminal Justice Programs and is supported by grant funds awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, USDOJ. The purpose of the grant was to continue to bridge the gap between medical examiner and law enforcement personnel through education and training. One of the goals of the training is to provide a venue for those involved in death investigation to network with others around the state. Attendees have included county medical examiners, county medical examiner investigators, law enforcement and investigators and lawyers from both the district attorneys and public defenders offices.

Remaining sessions include:

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>



Call for Reports (Continued)

The standard two-page form available for your use is attached to the email transmitting this newsletter. A blank, fillable, form is also available on our website at <https://www.tn.gov/health/health-program-areas/oscme.html> under the Resources for County Medical Examiners tab, pdf resources. If you would like to register to use the I-MED System to enter your reports electronically the database is available at https://apps.health.tn.gov/Medical_Examiner/ or you can contact our office at toll-free 844-860-4511 for assistance.

If you, through your county mayor's office, would like to claim reimbursement for the ROI's that are generated by you and submitted to the OSCME, or if you have any questions about a Report of Investigation or need blank forms, please contact our office for further information at toll-free 844-860-4511.

Reports of Investigation can be submitted via fax to 615-401-2532, via email to OSCME.ROI@tn.gov or by postal mail to Office of the State Chief Medical Examiner, Andrew Johnson Tower, 7th Floor, 710 James Robertson Parkway, Nashville, TN 37243.