

OSCME NEWSLETTER

TN-VDRS

The Tennessee Department of Health Office of the State Chief Medical Examiner for the first time is participating in the National Violent Death Reporting System, with data collection occurring at the state and local levels. The goal of this system is to capture information from multiple sources on all violent deaths. The information gathered in this system will be able to inform police, public health officials, violence prevention groups and policy makers in our community about the best ways to reduce violence here in Tennessee.

NVDRS is a surveillance system funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and carried out by state and territorial health departments or their bona fide agents. The system is unique as it uses information primarily from three sources: death certificates (vital statistics), coroner/medical examiner reports (including toxicology reports) and law enforcement reports to provide states and communities a comprehensive picture of the circumstances surrounding violent deaths. NVDRS data are collected under the same federal security and confidentiality guidelines that govern surveillance activities. NVDRS is the only state-based surveillance (reporting) system that pools **redacted** data on violent deaths and their circumstances from multiple sources into one **anonymous** database. No personally identifiable information is collected.

Violence is a major public health problem. In the United States, seven people per hour die a violent death. More than 19,000 people were victims of homicide and almost 45,000 people died by suicide in 2016 alone. The economic costs are staggering, with suicide costing the U.S. economy \$57 billion and homicide \$30 billion, and this is just the costs for medi-

cal care and lost work. Other costs, including the emotional toll on victims' families and the costs to the criminal justice system for arrest and incarceration of offenders are substantial and not included in this estimate. Also, many Americans survive violent experiences and are left struggling with long-term physical, psychological and emotional consequences. Violence erodes entire communities, reducing productivity, decreasing property values, disrupting social services and making people feel unsafe in the places where they live, work and learn.

NVDRS began collecting data on violent deaths from six states in 2002, followed by progressive additions to the system over several years. In 2018, NVDRS was expanded to include data collection from all 50 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia. This expansion brings NVDRS closer to the goal of providing a complete picture of violent deaths across the nation. As one of ten remaining states to participate in the NVDRS, Tennessee is one state significantly affected by violent death. According to the Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network's "Status of Suicide in Tennessee 2018" report, an average of three people die by suicide each day in Tennessee. In 2016, there were 1,110 recorded suicide deaths in Tennessee, at a rate of 16.2 per 100,000, which is the highest number and rate recorded in the last 35 years.

The Office of the State Chief Medical Examiner will begin collecting data in January of 2019. The OSCME has chosen a 40 percent pilot program option for targeting data collection efforts for the implementation of TNVDRS. The first year of implementation the office will collect all violent death data in Shelby and Davidson Counties, Tennessee. Shelby and Davidson counties have the highest populations in Tennessee, with the largest numbers of violent deaths and suicides. By choosing these two counties as the initial

target area, the information obtained should be a valuable indicator of prevention measures applicable statewide. Within the first year of the grant funding the office will begin to gather and build the relationships necessary to access all the data necessary for statewide TNVDRS reporting. In 2020, data will be collected from all 95 counties.

To assist with the implementation of TNVDRS, the OSCME has hired additional staff to include two medicolegal death investigators, Denise Martin and Lindsey Crim, and an epidemiologist, Wilson Koeh.

- Denise comes from a background in medicolegal death investigation, to include over 13 years at the Middle Tennessee Regional Forensic Center, ten of which as the director of investigations. Her education includes a Master's degree in criminal justice from Middle Tennessee State University as well as a Juris Doctor from Nashville School of Law. Denise received her law license in 2015 and practiced civil law for several years prior to accepting the opportunity to join the OSCME team.
- Lindsey has a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology and a Master of Criminal Justice degree, both from Middle Tennessee State University. She is a board-certified fellow with the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators. Lindsey has over seven years of experience in death investigation, three years as a forensic investigator and four years as the director of operations at the Volusia County Medical Examiner's Office in Daytona Beach, Florida. Originally from McMinnville, Lindsey has returned to Tennessee to continue her career in medicolegal death investigation in her home state.

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INFORMATION

TN-VDRS (Cont'd)

- Wilson is a doctoral candidate at West Virginia University, Epidemiology program. He completed his Masters of Public Health in biostatistics at Georgia Southern University, and thereafter served in the U.S Army Medical Corps. Wilson is interested in contributing to health improvement through research in injury-related deaths, poor perinatal outcomes, violence-related deaths and robust statistical analysis. In addition, he enjoys spending time with his family, biking and playing golf.



Denise Martin, Wilson Koech, and Lindsey Crim

Denise and Lindsey's positions are each 50 percent grant-funded through CDC/NVDRS to serve as data abstractors. They will primarily be responsible for abstracting the information from death certificates, medical examiner records and law enforcement records. Wilson's position is 100 percent grant-funded through CDC/NVDRS to serve as the program manager and coordinator for this project to ensure that adequate progress is being made on all activities, and that all deliverables are submitted within the required timeframe, including reports for dissemination. Specific duties at the local level include providing administrative, scientific, and technical guidance to local staff, engaging community stakeholders and communicating findings from TNVDRS. Staff will support the grant through involvement in liaising with partners, such as vital statistics, law enforcement and medical examiner offices.

Denise, Lindsey, and Wilson recently attended the NVDRS Reverse Site Visit in Atlanta, GA, December 11-13th, to learn about the implementation of TNVDRS. Day One consisted of best practices for working with partners, such as medical examiners, law enforcement, and vital statistics, to receive reports. Day Two was data abstractor training, focusing on what data elements need to be captured and entered into the system. Day Three was a wrap-up and discussed lessons learned, cross-state data sharing, self-

care while using NVDRS, and data quality evaluation and technical assistance. The best part of the training was the networking and relationship building with other states. By working together, we can help provide a clearer understanding of violent deaths.

Information related to NVDRS was taken from the CDC website, <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/nvdrs/index.html>.

Reports of Investigation

In order to fulfill the Office of the State Chief Medical Examiner (OSCME) responsibilities as required by Tennessee Code Annotated § 38-7-102 and increase consistency and improve death investigation, the OSCME must keep "full and complete records of all reports on investigations and examinations made pursuant to this part (Post Mortem Examination Act)." All investigated deaths must be reported to the OSCME, whether an autopsy is ordered or not, including those deaths reported to you even if jurisdiction is declined. For those registered in the I-MED database you can enter the report directly, bypassing the need to submit a hard copy. If you would like to register in the I-MED database just click on the link http://apps.health.tn.gov/Medical_Examiner/ or enter the URL into your search engine online and register. The OSCME will alert you when you have been approved as a user and will send by email a UserGuide.

If you are currently entering all investigative information into a form or database consistent with the State's ROI you may print that report and e-mail, fax or mail to the OSCME as a substitute for the state ROI form. You may also complete the State Report of Investigation form either by hand or using the fillable online pdf and submit it to the OSCME by email, postal mail or fax.

Use the following address: Office of the State Chief Medical Examiner, Andrew Johnson Tower, 7th Floor, 710 James Robertson Parkway, Nashville, TN 37243, or fax to 615-401-2532, or email to OSCME.ROI@tn.gov.

Call 1-844-860-4511
with questions concerning
death investigation,
interpretation of toxicology,
or assistance with completion
of a death certificate.

TRAINING

Bridging the Gap: A Team Approach to Investigating Child Deaths and Gunshot-Related Deaths

The Office of the State Chief Medical Examiner along with MTSU's Forensic Institute for Research and Education has presented three JAG trainings in the Fall of 2018 at Natchez Trace State Park, the Sevierville Police Department and Montgomery Bell State Park. This free two-day workshop is designed for medical examiners, medicolegal death investigations and law enforcement and focuses on death investigation, specifically child and infant death investigation and gunshot related deaths. POST, EMS, ABMDI and CME credits are offered for the course. The trainings are held around the state in an effort to reach as many county medical examiners, their investigators and law enforcement agencies without the burden or expense of traveling a long distance.

This is the fifth year the OSCME has hosted the two-day trainings with subject matter relative to the medical examiner system and death investigation in Tennessee. The project is funded under an agreement with the Tennessee Department of Finance and Administration, Office of Criminal Justice Programs and is supported by Award #2012-DJ-BX-0280 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, USDOJ.

There are three trainings remaining in the Spring of 2019, all of which have CME and CMEI spots available. The links below will take you to registration.

Reelfoot Lake, April 3 & 4, 2019:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/bridging-the-gap-investigating-child-deaths-and-gunshot-related-deaths-tickets-48891122664>

Cove Lake, April 17 & 18, 2019:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/bridging-the-gap-investigating-child-deaths-and-gunshot-related-deaths-tickets-48891175823>

Montgomery Bell 2019:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/bridging-the-gap-investigating-child-deaths-and-gunshot-related-deaths-tickets-48891277126>

If you have any issue with registration please feel free to contact our office toll free (844) 860-4511.



Sevierville attendees taking the post-training test Oct 2018



Dr. Adele Lewis, Montgomery Bell State Park Dec. 2018

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