

# OSCME NEWSLETTER

## Greetings from the OSCME

Greetings County Medical Examiners and Death Investigators,

I have now been in the position of State Chief Medical Examiner for Tennessee full-time since May 2<sup>nd</sup>. Dr. Adele Lewis, Deputy State Chief Medical Examiner, Margaret Hyder, Deputy Director and I have been assessing and organizing the office and making plans for the future.

Operating under the Department of Health, our goal is to create statewide consistency of high quality medicolegal death investigation and forensic autopsy service.

The primary Office of the State Chief Medical Examiner (OSCME) is located on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of the Andrew Johnson Tower, 710 James Robertson Parkway in Nashville. Ms. Hyder will continue to manage the satellite office in Johnson City.

In addition to providing training sessions and consultation for county medical examiners and their investigators, we also will be meeting with the Department of Health Division of Communicable Environmental Disease and Emergency Preparedness and the Tennessee Emergency Management

Agency (TEMA) to ensure the medical examiner system is included in emergency preparedness planning, training and future exercises.

We are working to obtain and implement an electronic case management system in close consultation with the county medical examiners and death investigators in order to ease documentation, improve statistical analyses, and issue an annual report on cause and manner of death and mortality trends. This will be a long-term project which will span the next several years.

Our goal is to communicate with you on at least a quarterly basis via letter or newsletter so that you will have updates on our progress, notification of training sessions and other information necessary to perform your job. If you move, have new contact information (phone or e-mail) or changes in staff please contact our office at (844) 860-4511 or at [Health.OSCME@tn.gov](mailto:Health.OSCME@tn.gov) so that we can update our records.

As most of you are aware, death investigation and the forensic sciences, in general, have been under national scrutiny by the media, in court cases and by federal regulatory agencies. We need to work

together to make sure Tennessee continues to meet national standards as new guidelines and regulations continue to emerge.

I look forward to meeting each of you and am excited about the potential to make Tennessee a leader in death investigation. I hope you will all continue to work with the OSCME to provide a service to the citizens of Tennessee and ensure all deaths are investigated properly.

Sincerely,

Julia C. Goodin, MD, MPA  
State Chief Medical Examiner

## Two Medicolegal Death Investigators Join OSCME

After interviewing multiple highly qualified candidates, we hired two medicolegal death investigators who will assist with training and support of the county medical examiners and their investigators.

Fran Wheatley, with whom many of you are familiar, has more than sixteen years of experience providing death investigation and administrative services for forensic centers. She has a B.S. in Forensic Science from Eastern Kentucky University and a M.A. Degree in Anthropology from the University of Tennessee started. She started with the OSCME on August 8<sup>th</sup>.

Andrew Wilson, who has more than seven years of experience as a medicolegal death investigator, has a B.S from Rutgers University in Anthropology and graduate studies in Forensic and Biological Anthropology at Mercyhurst University. He started with our office on August 15<sup>th</sup>.

## “Death Investigations 101” Training Planned

The OSCME staff will be traveling to and providing training for all County Medical Examiners and Death Investigators in the form of short, half- or full-day training sessions regarding scene investigation with mock scene scenarios, photography, death certification and sections of the Tennessee Code Annotated pertaining to death investigations and

medical examiner jurisdiction.

The plan is to provide these sessions throughout the state to one to four counties at a time in order to reach everyone within the next two years. As a complement to these sessions we will issue a revised death investigation handbook in conjunction with the Medical Examiner Advisory Council.

# New, Shorter ROI Must be Completed and Sent to OSCME

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).” Attached to this newsletter is the new updated, less lengthy, ‘Report of Investigation’ (ROI) that you should use for the investigation of all deaths going forward. It incorporates the ‘Order for Autopsy’ at the bottom of the second page, eliminating the need for investigators to complete duplicative forms. All investigated deaths must be reported to the OSCME, whether an autopsy is ordered or not. It also includes those deaths reported to you even if jurisdiction is declined. You may complete the form either by hand or electronically and submit it to the OSCME by e-mail, regular 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](mailto:OSCME.ROI@tn.gov).

The new ‘Medication Log’ form is also attached. Both of these documents may be found in electronic type ready format on our Website at <https://www.tn.gov/health/section/OSCME>.

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 attached ROI form.

An interim solution for the capture of

medical examiner data while the state case management system is being selected, procured and implemented is being developed. This interim solution is an update to a previous state system used prior to UVIS, that some of you are familiar with. It allows for the entry of information and uploading of documents, such as the ROI, Order for Autopsy and Medication Log via the internet. **YOU ARE NOT REQUIRED TO USE THIS SYSTEM.** If you would like to enter your information directly via this system, contact Margaret Hyder at 423-439-8403, provide her with your information and she will grant you access to the system as a user.

The extra ‘Report of Drug Overdose Deaths’ form is being eliminated. In cases of suspected drug overdose and in other cases where medications are found at the scene, please complete the ‘Medication Log Form’ and include it with the ROI.

Drug overdose deaths must be investigated and reported per Rule 1200-36-01 “Investigation of Deaths Resulting from Opiate, Illegal or Illicit Drug Overdoses.” In 2013, Rule 1200-36-01 was enacted in response to legislative mandate Public Chapter 916, also known as “The Henry Granju Act”, which prescribed an appropriate report by county medical examiners in “cases of death involving from opiate, illegal or illicit drug overdose”. Governor Haslam’s Public Safety Action Plan also strives to “improve the collection of uniform drug overdose reporting by county medical examiners”.

Ideally, all deaths suspected to be related to drug use or abuse would receive a full autopsy. However, this simply is not feasible given current funding and staffing .

The intent of the rule is to enhance and standardize reporting of suspected drug overdose deaths so that accurate statistics are obtained to help identify and track drug use trends in counties, regions, and statewide, with the ultimate goal of preventing these deaths.

When investigating an out-of-hospital death thought to be related to drug use or abuse, conduct a scene investigation, gather as much information as possible about the decedent’s medical history and the circumstances. Inventory medications found at the scene on the Medication Log. The Medication Log and Report of Investigation (ROI) are then submitted to the OSCME, even if an autopsy is not ordered. If an autopsy is ordered, copies of the Medication Log and ROI should also be sent to the regional forensic center performing the autopsy.

The Regional Forensic Centers (RFC) will continue to send complete autopsy reports to the satellite office in Johnson City.

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