
MEDICAL EXAMINER ACTIVITY

The Medical Examiner's Office staff 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. The Medical Examiner pathologists 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 office, Medical Examiner staff establish the decedent's identity, and locate and notify the next-of-kin of the death. In addition, staff secures property that belongs to the decedent and releases it according to legal requirements. In most cases identification and property 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. Medical Examiner staff ensure that all leads have been exhausted in pursuit of next-of-kin; this can be a very time consuming but ultimately rewarding effort.

The Medical Examiner's autopsy staff and forensic pathologists perform a postmortem examination on each decedent that may include external and internal photographs, the preservation of various body fluids and tissues for microscopic and toxicologic analysis, and in many cases, skeletal and dental radiography. The above examinations are essential items in those cases where the pathologist provides court testimony. The Medical Examiner's office also provides forensic anthropology services, 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 participate 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.

The Medical Examiner provides autopsy reports and related data from individual investigations to law enforcement agencies, prosecuting attorneys, and many other agencies including Labor and Industries, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Consumer Product Safety Commission. The Medical Examiner reports drug related deaths 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 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 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 analyze 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 traffic collisions, and investigation of therapeutic complication deaths. In addition, the Medical Examiner's Office participates in the education of medical students, pathology residents, emergency medical service providers, college interns, and law enforcement personnel.

In 2004, 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, M.D., Ph.D.

Associations, Committees and Boards:

- King County Child Death Review Committee
- Washington State Child Death Review Advisory Committee
- King County Elder Abuse Council
- 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 Jail Health Services Quality Assurance Committee
- Member, National Association of Medical Examiners
- Member, American Academy of Forensic Sciences
- Member, Washington State and American Medical Associations
- Member, Region 10 DMORT (Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team)
- Participant, Homeless Death Review Project

Publications:

- *Unexpected hazard of illegal immigration: Outbreak of viral myocarditis exacerbated by confinement and deprivation in a shipboard cargo container.* Li MK, Beck MA, Shi Q, Harruff RC, American Journal Forensic Medicine & Pathology, 2004 Jun;25 (2):117-24.
- *Tramadol (Ultram) concentrations in death investigation and impaired driving cases and their significance.* Clarkson JE, Lacy JM, Fligner CL, Thiersch N, Howard J, Harruff RC, Logan BK. Journal of Forensic Sciences 2004 Sep; 49(5):1101-5.

Trainings and Educational Activities:

- Course Director, King County Medical Examiner's Office Forensic Conference, "Problems in Forensic Pathology," Accredited by University of Washington Office for Continuing Medical Education.
- Participant, "Seattle Police Department Organ Donation Education Video," for LifeCenter Northwest, Seattle, WA.

Scientific Presentations:

- Compressed Gas Cylinder Related Injuries: Case Report of a Fatality Associated with a Recreational Paintball Gun, Review of the Literature and Safety Recommendations.
Haikal NA, Harruff RC.
American Academy of Forensic Sciences Annual Meeting, Dallas, TX.

Local and Regional Educational Presentations:

- Advanced Traffic Collision Reconstruction
Kent Police Department
Kent, WA February 12
- The Medical Examiner's Office Criminal Justice Advisory Group
Regional Law, Safety, & Justice Center
Seattle, WA February 26
- Medicolegal & Public Health Considerations in Emergency Medical Care
West Region EMS Conference
Ocean Shores, WA February 29
- The Medical Examiner's Office & Homicide Investigation
University Preparatory Academy
Seattle, WA March 4
- Strangulation Injuries
King County Deputy Prosecuting Attorneys
Seattle, WA March 20
- Female Homicide Victims
University of Tennessee
Memphis, TN April 1
- Pattern Injuries / Strangulation
West Region EMS Training
St. Martin's College
Lacey, WA April 8
- Strangulation in Domestic Violence
Domestic Violence Investigation Training
King County Sheriff's Office
Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission
Burien, WA April 16

- Traffic Fatalities / Infant Death Investigation
Medicolegal Investigation of Death Course
UW Extension Certificate Program in Forensics
Seattle, WA April 26
- Pattern Injuries / Strangulation
Core Training for Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners
Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress
University of Washington
Seattle, WA April 28
- Homicide Investigation
Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission
Burien, WA May 13
- Pattern Injuries / Strangulation
Core Training for Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners
Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress
University of Washington
Seattle, WA September 28
- Analysis of Traffic Fatalities
Advanced Collision Investigation
Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission
Everett, WA October 5
- Crime Scene Investigation
Puget Sound American Association of Legal Nurse Consultants
Edmonds, WA October 22
- Firearm Injuries
Medicolegal Investigation of Death Course
UW Extension Certificate Program in Forensics
Seattle, WA October 26
- Introduction to the Medical Examiner's Office
Forensic Science Class
The Overlake School
Redmond, WA November 18
- Forensic Medical Photography
Advanced Training for Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners
Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress
University of Washington
Seattle, WA December 9

Greg Hewett, MDiv, Program Manager IV

Associations, Committees and Boards:

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

Presentations:

- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner
Al Noriega, Co-presenter
Seattle University
Seattle, WA January 21
- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner
Al Noriega, Co-presenter
Seattle University Criminal Justice Program
Seattle, WA May 5
- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner
Al Noriega, Co-presenter
SPD Community Police Academy
Seattle Police Department
Seattle, WA May 10
- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner
Al Noriega, Co-presenter
Seattle University Criminal Justice Program
Seattle, WA May 12

Al Noriega, Lead Medicolegal Death Investigator***Associations, Committees and Boards:***

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

Presentations:

- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner
Society of Counsel Representing Accused Persons
King County Public Defenders
Seattle, WA January 14
- Policies and Procedures of the King County Medical Examiner
Valley Medical Center
Renton, WA
Seattle, WA January 19
- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner
Greg Hewett, Co-presenter
Seattle University
Seattle, WA January 21
- Basic Forensic Death Investigation for Law Enforcement
Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission/Academy
Seattle, WA March 26
- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner

Greg Hewett, Co-presenter
Seattle University Criminal Justice Program
Seattle, WA May 5

- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner
Investigator Nathan Geerdes, Co-presenter
Forensic Science Program
Redmond High School
Redmond, WA May 5
- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner
SPD Community Police Academy
Seattle Police Department
Seattle, WA May 10
- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner
Virginia Mason Laboratory Department
Virginia Mason Medical Center
Seattle, WA May 11
- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner
Greg Hewett, Co-presenter
Seattle University Criminal Justice Program
Seattle, WA May 12
- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner
SPD Explores
East Precinct-School Emphasis Team
Seattle Police Department
Seattle, WA May 19
- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner
Investigator Nathan Geerdes, Co-presenter
King County Sheriff Explores
King County Sheriffs Office
Seattle, WA August 23
- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner
Investigator Nathan Geerdes, Co-presenter
University of Washington
Seattle, WA August 23
- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner
Investigator Nathan Geerdes, Co-presenter
Redmond High School Forensic Science Program
Redmond, WA October 8
- Basic Forensic Death Investigation
Eastside Fire Chaplains
Issaquah, WA October 12
- Night of 1,000 Stars Press Conference, King County Medical Examiners Safety Advisory
Tony Gomez (King County Public Health), Co-presenter
Washington State Patrol, Bellevue Office
Bellevue, WA October 25
- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner

Investigator Nathan Geerdes, Co-presenter
Eastside Fire and Rescue Personnel
Seattle, WA October 2

Katherine Taylor, Ph.D., Forensic Anthropologist & Medicolegal Death Investigator

Associations, Committees and Boards:

- Member of the Attorney General's Task Force on Missing and Unidentified Persons representing the Washington Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners
- Fellow, American Academy of Forensic Sciences
- Diplomate, American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators
- Member, Washington Association of Coroners & Medical Examiners

Presentations:

- Forensic Anthropology
Green River Community College Forensic Science Class
Auburn, WA February 4
- Forensic Anthropology
Seattle Society of Clinical Laboratory Science
Shoreline, WA March 3
- Forensic Anthropology
Tacoma Community College Anthropology Class
Tacoma, WA March 12
- Postmortem Interval & Determination of Human v. Non-Human Bones
WA State Search & Rescue
Lewis County, WA May 22
- Outdoor Scenes & Buried Body School
Seattle Police Crime Scene Investigation Unit
Seattle, WA June 25
- Buried Body School
Washington State Patrol Crime Scene Response Unit
Seattle, WA August 2 & 3
- Buried Body School
Oregon Law Enforcement
Eugene, OR August 30 and September 1
- Outdoor Scenes & Buried Body School
Washington & Oregon Lawman's Association
Seattle, WA September 10
- Identification of Gunshot Wounds in Bone
2nd Annual Violent Crimes Investigation Conference
WA Criminal Justice Training Commission
Burien, WA October 26

James A. Sosik, Jr., B.A.-Anthropology, Medicolegal Death Investigator***Associations, Committees and Boards:***

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

Presentations:

- DUI Victim's Panel, Northshore High School Driver's Education Class, Woodinville, WA May 26
- DUI Victim's Panel, Northshore High School Driver's Education Class, Woodinville, WA Oct 12

Nathan Geerdes, B.A. – Psychology, Medicolegal Death Investigator***Associations, Committees and Boards:***

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

Presentations:

- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner
Lead Investigator Al Noriega, Co-presenter
Forensic Science Program
Redmond High School
Redmond, WA May 5
- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner
Lead Investigator Al Noriega, Co-presenter
King County Sheriff Explores
King County Sheriff's Office
Seattle, WA August 23
- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner
Lead Investigator Al Noriega, Co-presenter
University of Washington
Seattle, WA August 23
- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner
Lead Investigator Al Noriega, Co-presenter
Redmond High School Forensic Science Program
Redmond, WA October 8
- Role and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiner
Lead Investigator Al Noriega, Co-presenter
Eastside Fire and Rescue Personnel
Seattle, WA October 29

Table 12-1 **Weekly Variation of Deaths Investigated by the King County Medical Examiner's Office / 2004**

| | TOTAL |
|------------------------------|-------|
| Number of weeks studied | 52 |
| Mean number of cases assumed | 36 |
| Maximum in any one week | 51 |
| Minimum in any one week | 23 |

Table 12-2 **Weekly Variation of Autopsies Performed by the King County Medical Examiner's Office / 2004**

| | TOTAL |
|--------------------------|-------|
| Number of weeks studied | 52 |
| Mean number of autopsies | 23 |
| Maximum in any one week | 48 |
| Minimum in any one week | 13 |

Organization of the King County Medical Examiner's Office 2004

