



D32 Alcestis: A National Network for Mortality Data Collection and Bio-Terrorism and Injury Surveillance

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The goals of this presentation are to educate the forensic community of the existence of a bio-terrorism and injury surveillance program administered by the Center for Collaborative Research in Health Outcomes and Policy (CRHOP). Participants of the poster session will see the benefits of collecting data via the Internet, will realize potential research topics, and will learn about research currently underway from data collected by this initiative.

This poster will present an overview of Alcestis as well as the benefits that can be obtained by medical examiners, coroners, and death scene investigators, including preliminary findings of analysis conducted from data collected by Alcestis in Michigan.

Medical examiner and coroner investigations produce valuable information useful to health officials, the criminal justice system, and families of the deceased. Alcestis creates uniform standards and establishes data collection and reporting procedures for medical examiners and coroners at the state and county level nationally.

Alcestis bridges the gap between surveillance and research with the creation of an electronic system storing in-depth data on the circumstances and social factors surrounding fatal injuries and unexpected deaths. Hosted on the Internet, the database provides health professionals with a valuable tool for community health assessments, injury prevention efforts, organization of EMS services, and other statewide efforts.

With the continued expansion of Alcestis nationally, the value that states and researchers derive from the database will expand. This initiative will allow states to standardize and establish data collection procedures as well as make possible nationwide research opportunities that, heretofore, were unfeasible. The primary benefit to be obtained from Alcestis is its ability to serve as a tool for county, regional or state surveillance of bio-terrorism and injuries.

Alcestis will provide medical examiner/coroner offices a fully supported package that includes secure Internet access to the on-line database, paper data collection forms, and data analysis tools. Training, tech support and quality improvements will be on-going. Medical examiners and coroners benefit from Alcestis through quick and easy access to their mortality data, instant reports, and the ability to share data among counties and with other colleagues.

The system consists of three components: a death scene investigation report, an Internet-based database container for medical examiner data entry, and county profile pages connected to the database that automatically aggregate and chart the data for reporting. Samples of these components are provided in Appendix B. When compared with traditional medical examiner data collection and storage methods, Alcestis offers the following advantages:

- Alcestis staff conducts system maintenance and backups centrally.
- There is no need to install software on the user's machine or allocate hard-drive space for data storage.
- Users receive routine upgrades to the database as it is continuously improved.
- The system can be accessed at any time from any computer with Internet connectivity.
- If a person can "surf the web" he/she can use the system. There are no new programs to learn.
- Proven public/private key security features and encryption are in place to make submission of information secure.
- Additional products/services include a user manual, data dictionary, codebook, training materials, data integrity checks, and technical support.

The software is managed and accessible via the Internet; it is written in common programming languages, compatible with the majority of off-the-shelf products, scalable based on office size, and requires no hardware allocation by the end-users. Additional services are provided that include a data collection form that mirrors the electronic database, an easy-to-read user manual explaining the system design and functionality, a codebook and data dictionary, and a staffed technical support hot line.

Currently, Alcestis is working with the CPSC, Kids-N-Cars, MIFACE, The Firearms Surveillance Initiative, and the CDC as well as research oriented ME/coroner offices in Pennsylvania, Florida, West Virginia, and California to establish initial memberships with ME/Coroner offices for Implementation of Alcestis.

Bio-Terrorism, Injury Surveillance, Data Collection