



Pathology Biology Section – 2003

G26 Bioterrorism Response and Training: Building Upon Mass Disaster and Multiple Fatality Preparedness at the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Boston, MA

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After attending this presentation the participant will understand how Massachusetts has sought to continue to build a multiple fatality plan with bioterrorism applications and will understand creative solutions to administering anti-terrorism response modalities in level-funded state agencies.

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) has a need to both augment its ability to respond to a mass casualty event involving nuclear, biological, and chemical agents; and to increase surveillance of deaths in Massachusetts for unusual infectious agents such as anthrax, smallpox, plague, and tularemia. Currently, the OCME must rely solely on the infrastructure and personnel of its headquarter office in Boston and personnel located at three minor satellite offices, resulting in insufficient resources to respond to a mass casualty disaster. This situation has been dramatically improved by the creation of partnerships with pathology departments of major academic medical centers in the Commonwealth, which have effectively served to “virtually” expand the infrastructure and personnel available for response and death surveillance.

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in Massachusetts has received level funding for a period of years. The forensic terrain over that time has become more complex and expensive. To provide current investigative techniques and analyses that contribute to case documentation and eventual courtroom presentation has taxed operational budgets. As a state agency, the OCME has access to and liaisons with other state agencies that provide analytical techniques and research resources. Through programs developed in response to complying with Mass Fatality Preparedness Initiatives, the office has established linkages with departments within the Executive Office of Public Safety, Public Health, the Boston Medical Hospital Community and the University System. The coalescence of state and public agencies has provided continued opportunity for state-supported grants and research partnerships. The OCME applied and received three phases of funding through the Executive Office of Public Safety, entitled the Edward Byrne Memorial State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance Formula Grant Program. The third phase is allowing the office to implement a virtual expansion of medical staff, through the greater Boston community by providing training in bioterrorism preparedness and surveillance.

In order to achieve these goals, it was necessary to create partnerships with several academic pathology departments in the greater Boston area. The purpose of these partnerships has been to provide training to personnel at each participating department in policies and procedures used in forensic death investigation and victim identification. Additionally, an early detection and surveillance system has been developed to recognize unusual infectious agents at autopsy, and to become familiar with procedures required in the processing of deaths due to chemical and nuclear agents. Training materials developed for this project will be made available for distribution.

Bioterrorism, Training, Virtual Staff Extension