



### D49 Is Current Medicolegal Death Investigator Training Meeting the Profession's Needs?

Julie A. Howe, BS, MBA\*, Saint Louis University School of Medicine, Division of Forensic Pathology, 1402 South Grand Boulevard; R512, St. Louis, MO 63104-1028

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This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by increasing awareness of medicolegal death investigation training programs available throughout the country. The impact of this trend is discussed as well as the qualities that are necessary to provide good training.

The past few years have brought about an increased interest in medicolegal death investigation due largely to media exposure and television programming. Many high school students inquire about baccalaureate programs in this field without realizing that education has traditionally been received on-the-job or through training courses. Until national requirements are mandated within the profession, which would allow for standardized curriculums, training courses continue to be the vehicle for knowledge. With the 1998 distribution of *Death Investigation: A Guide for the Scene Investigator*, published by the National Institutes of Justice, courses are now focusing on the 29 essential skills and standards of practice identified. Using these guidelines in place of agency specific protocols is the first step in promoting standardization across jurisdictional boundaries. Individuals who develop new training courses should always use the guidelines to structure their course content to ensure consistency.

Media attention has brought about a heightened awareness of the significant role that medicolegal death investigators play in the prosecutorial process. This awareness has helped bring about a proliferation of basic training courses offered throughout the country to teach basic medicolegal knowledge and skills, even though few states mandate any type of training for their investigative personnel. There are roughly ten basic medicolegal death investigation courses offered nationally on a regular basis. These few offerings are severely deficient to educate the thousands of medicolegal death investigators working for Medical Examiner or Coroner jurisdictions.

The lack of a central repository for educational offerings or training is unfortunate. Forensic publications, such as the AAFS Newsletter, list courses specific to medicolegal death investigation. You can also discover training opportunities by performing a simple search on the Internet. Others, however, are listed under the sponsoring university or agency and are not accessible to anyone unfamiliar with its existence because key words are not entered into a search engine. Most sponsoring agencies retain a mailing list. This is certainly acceptable but presents a problem for expanding the audience. Thus, word of mouth still seems to be the most popular method of promoting training opportunities.

There are several variations in instruction methods. The majority of training courses have a medical examiner listed as the director and are affiliated with a university. Some allow open enrollment while others are state or region specific. Class size is limited when hands-on instruction or workshops are involved, while other courses lecture in the traditional manner to hundreds. The majority of courses utilize local forensic scientists to teach basic death investigation information but some bring in guest speakers who are considered experts in their field. Costs vary from \$75 for two days to \$675 for five days.

With the evolution of technology, education is also being offered online. Community colleges and universities are beginning to incorporate medicolegal death investigation topics in their criminal justice curriculums. Even though this is an accepted method of learning, it removes the ability for registrants to share their experiences among peers in a classroom setting. Most medicolegal death investigators claim these discussions are a valuable part of the training. Perhaps online education is better suited for continuing education.

New courses that are being implemented nationally to meet the rising need for training new employees may be too basic for veteran medicolegal death investigators. Therefore, specialized training within forensic disciplines is also desperately needed to enhance the investigators' base knowledge. Specific courses in bloodstain analysis, bloodspatter interpretation, forensic photography, entomology collection, etc. are currently offered but are usually limited to a specific region within the country depending on where the instructors are located.

There are certain qualities that define good training. Training funds are often limited, requiring one to choose their training options wisely. An analysis of traits will be discussed to evaluate educational offerings and determine if they meet the desired needs of the profession.

#### Medicolegal Death Investigation, Training, Education