



## Pathology & Biology Section – 2004

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### **G9 Dramatic Rise in Methadone-Related Deaths in Oklahoma 1990-2002**

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After attending this presentation, attendees will have awareness of dramatic increase in methadone-related deaths and potential explanation of why they occur. This trend is evolving nationwide and there is every expectation that it will continue.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by making the forensic community aware of the emerging epidemic of deaths related to this drug and the reasons for it. Unique aspects of its pharmacology interacting with ignorance of this by physicians, patients, and substance abusers have resulted in an emerging tragedy. The forensic community needs to enlighten the broader community as part of its public health and public safety missions.

Deaths attributed to the toxic effects of methadone, alone or in combination with other drugs, have dramatically increased in the State of Oklahoma during the study period. Tabulation of these deaths on an annual basis from records of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner of the State of Oklahoma demonstrates this trend. A comparison of deaths in the three-year period 1990–1992 versus 2000–2002 shows 7 versus 140 respectively. This parallels a dramatic rise in the prescribing of methadone in the state, particularly for the treatment of chronic pain. Possible rationales for this increase including unique aspects of the pharmacology of methadone are discussed.

#### **Methadone, Deaths, Chronic Pain**