



K49 Deaths Due to the Acute Effects of Drugs Investigated in Jefferson Parish Louisiana

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand quantitative toxicology's role in rendering cause and manner of death in any case; the impact of prosecutor variation in under or overestimating deaths due to the acute effects of drugs.

This presentation illuminates the growing problem of drug abuse in suburban and rural areas including the possible change in the pattern of abuse and offers the hope for/opportunity for future collaborative study with other areas, and also stresses the importance of investigative information in rendering the appropriate cause and manner of death.

The Jefferson Parish Forensic Center is a regional Forensic Center in Harvey, Louisiana that serves Jefferson Parish (JP), a suburban area neighboring New Orleans, as well as 20+ other rural and suburban parishes in south/central Louisiana. Of the 798 post mortem examinations performed in 2002, 146 (18%) were due to the acute effects of drugs. In JP alone 24% of cases (101/421) were due to the acute effect of drugs. These drug-related deaths accounted for 37% (101/272) of all violent deaths in Jefferson Parish. Of these 101 drug deaths in JP, 85 were classified as accident, 13 as suicide, and 2 as undetermined. The accidental acute drug-effect related deaths accounted for 53% (85/161) of all accidental deaths in JP. Most of these were due to the effects of multiple drugs ranging from illicit drugs such as cocaine, methamphetamine and heroin to the commonly abused prescription drugs especially hydrocodone, carisoprodol, and alprazolam. Numerous cases also were positive for methadone alone or most often in combination with other drugs. Similar trends were present in other parishes though suicides were more frequent than in JP. Additional data will be presented on the individual drugs detected, the combination of drugs including the significance of levels, the presence of concomitant natural disease, and the interaction of various factors. Rendering of the various causes and manners of deaths in cases in which drugs are present will also be discussed including possible prosecutor variation in under or overestimating these types of deaths.

Drugs, Toxicology, Deaths