



D7 Is Pediatric Death Investigation Enhanced by the Credentials of the Investigator?

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The purpose of this poster is to determine if credentials of an investigator enhance information gathering during the initial phase of child death investigation. This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by helping attendees to realize what credentials would be required for the development of dedicated pediatric investigators.

Like many other states in the nation, Maryland appoints people as investigators. Each brings their unique experiences and each person has varying credentials. Maryland has a detailed child death protocol that requires the forensic investigators or deputy medical examiners to inspect the child at the location where they are pronounced, to investigate the scene where they were last known alive, and to interview witnesses and family. In addition to the standard investigation report, a lengthy child death investigation protocol must be completed. A lack of total compliance with the child death protocol has been recognized. Many possible variables were the length of time required to complete the protocol, the interrupted flow of the investigation tool, the cooperation of the investigating police agency, the comfort level of the investigator, and lastly the credentials of the forensic investigator or deputy medical examiner. It has been suggested that the comfort level of the investigator often depends on their credentials. The investigators were divided into groups based on their credentials: physicians, nurses, pre-hospital providers, and those with no medical credentials. A five-year evaluation determined which group of investigators had the most complete data and highest compliance with the protocol procedures. The case data evaluation was based upon compliance with the entire protocol and the type of data collected during the initial phase of the investigation. The investigation tool was broken down into these categories: demographics, social history, birth mother's medical history and scene evaluation, and scene response. Each tool was evaluated for the presence of required information. A statistical comparison of results of the credentials of the investigators was performed. Geographic trends were taken into consideration. The results indicated that the most highly educated professionals had the lowest compliance rate and geographic trends tended to support this finding.

Forensic investigators are appointed to complete scene investigations for the medical examiner. Minimum qualifications are two years of trauma experience or thirty college credits in the science, forensics, or a related field of study. A county deputy medical examiner is an appointed physician who performs the same duties as the forensic investigator with the exception that they can complete a death certificate for cases that do not require an autopsy. Deputy medical examiners may or may not have formal training in forensics other than that provided by the authors' office in Baltimore. A child is defined as less than two years of age. The Maryland Child Death Protocol is a procedure which requires the investigating deputy medical examiner or the forensic investigator to complete all of the following: inspect the body at the location where it was pronounced, inspect the scene where the subject was last known alive, obtain photograph, obtain pertinent records, retrieve medications, retrieve admission lab samples, interview the family and the witnesses, and discuss the case with the police. Medical examiner jurisdiction is determined by the physical location at which the child was pronounced; therefore, cases which were determined to be a Maryland Medical Examiner's case but the incident location was not in Maryland were excluded. Staffing limitations prevent Baltimore City Forensic investigators from completing the entire child death protocol. The homicide detective will often evaluate the scene of the incident, interview the family, and supply the information required for the Child Death Investigation Form. Due to the described operational differences, Baltimore City cases were excluded. There are some occasions where warrants were necessary and the police restrict access to the scene or to witnesses. Cases where it is documented that the investigation police agency did not allow protocol compliance were excluded.

It has been suggested that a group of dedicated pediatric investigators would provide a higher level of investigations. The impedance of this study was to determine which credentials, if any, a pediatric investigator should have.

Child Death Protocol, Investigation, Jurisdiction