



D7 Intuition, Interaction, and the Team Approach to Death Scene Investigation

Mary Beth Hauptle, DDS, Fulton County Medical Examiner's Office, 430 Pryor Street, SW, Atlanta, GA 30312*

Attendees will learn the advantage of “thinking out loud” and trusting their instincts on the scene of death, in a team approach to resolving issues regarding the manner of death. This presentation will impact the forensic community by fostering the team approach to quality death scene investigation. Through review of a series of documented death scene investigations, the author will offer insight into the interplay of deductive thinking with intuition in making assessments regarding the circumstances of a death without witness. By offering lessons learned through experience, this presentation will teach the value of sharing information on the scene by naturally “thinking out loud.” Typical questions investigators need to ask themselves about the imagined scenario of death will be posed.

The imagination will be given full rein in deciphering the activities of the decedent at the time of death, coupling known environmental facts with surmised behavior associated with poor judgment when ingesting alcohol. Scenes of death resulting from incumbent failure to execute safety precaution on the decedent's part will be presented.

The attendee will walk through an assessment of two distinctly separate yet similar death scenes and examine the thinking that went into drawing conclusions regarding the proposed manner of death. In comparing and critiquing the photographic documentation of the two cases, the author will demonstrate lessons learned in establishing a good vantage point of the photographs in “telling the story” and the impediment of artificial barriers to “seeing the forest for the trees.” Challenges to elucidating the suggested unfolding of the circumstances of death to the medical examiner back in the office will be discussed.

The scene of an unwitnessed death involving decomposed remains will pique the curiosity of the attendee in mentally recreating the decedent's final actions by asking, “How and why did he wind up in that position?” When last known alive time was vague at best on an unwitnessed death scene investigation with mummified remains, an example of the rapid firing of the unconscious mind will answer the question, “What's wrong with this picture?”

Scene, Investigation, Death