



D32 Death Investigations in Rural Meigs County, Ohio Under the Coroner's Inquest System

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the coroner investigation system in Ohio, the challenges faced by rural counties investigating deaths, and how regional forensic systems in Ohio, such as the Montgomery County Coroner's Office, assists with rural county investigations.

The presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing a view that a coroner system need not be arcane and antiquated; rather, if properly regulated by state law, the coroner investigation system such as exists in Ohio can be as effective a tool for death investigations as the medical examiner system.

Ohio is a coroner state. Each of the 88 counties elects a physician who serves for four years in that capacity. Ohio law requires the coroner to be a licensed physician who has been in practice a minimum of two years and is mandated 16 hours of professional development per year. Larger cities such as Columbus, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Dayton have forensic centers that serve as forensic resource centers for counties that do not have the fiscal resources to support such centers.

Meigs County, Ohio, with a population of about 23,500 persons is situated in the Appalachian plateau region of southeast Ohio. The county is economically challenged with a systemic unemployment rate of over 15%. Medicolegal investigation in this fiscal environment is a challenge. The current annual budget for the coroner's office is

\$29,096.00. The office employs an elected coroner, the incumbent of which is a family practice medical doctor and has been the coroner since 1988, as well as an investigator who is also the County Health Commissioner. The office receives an average of 50 cases calls per year of which about 24 are sent to the Montgomery County Coroner's office for autopsy. The cost for an autopsy, including transportation of remains, is about \$1,800.00. These costs are paid out of the County General Fund and are not part of the coroner's budget. The budgets of the sheriff's office and local police jurisdictions for investigations as well as training are likewise restricted and as a result, the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification is often called upon to assist in death investigations.

Because of fiscal constraints, not all cases reported to the coroner's office are scene investigated beyond the telephone call. Natural manners involving, hospice, nursing homes, and cases with a documented medical history, especially the elderly, do not normally receive a response. Sudden and unexpected death involving adults and children are investigated but not all are sent for autopsy depending on investigative circumstances. Homicides and undetermined are autopsied. Most suicides not involving the elderly with a medical history and most accidental deaths are sent for autopsy.

It is believed that the Ohio coroner's system serves medicolegal purposes satisfactorily. Cases are investigated on a case by case basis with resources directed to those cases that most impact the public safety and health of the community.

Coroner, Medical Examiner, Death Investigations