



D33 The Society of Medicolegal Death Investigators is Now Operational

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be informed of the Society of Medicolegal Death Investigators, a newly created educational organization to promote medicolegal death investigators and their profession.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by introducing attendees to The Society of Medicolegal Death Investigators (SOMDI), the newly created professional organization for medicolegal death investigators.

Medicolegal death investigators are employees of medical examiner or coroner offices who investigate violent, suspicious, sudden and unexpected deaths. Following office standard office procedures, they are the first line of defense of the jurisdiction's death investigation system. Their decisions at the time of the initial death report can mean the difference between a homicide being overlooked or recognized or a dead person never being identified, misidentified or scientifically identified.

Lay investigators began working for medical examiner systems in the mid-1960s. In the early 1990s, a group of veteran, experienced death investigators from throughout the United States collaborated and developed a set of voluntary guidelines for their profession. The National Institutes of Justice then published these in December 1997. The term "medicolegal death investigator" was selected to differentiate these individual investigating deaths for coroner and medical examiner offices from investigators working for law enforcement agencies.

Since 1998, the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI) has been professionally certifying medicolegal death investigators. As of July 31, 2010 there are more than 1,550 medicolegal death investigators certified in North America and four foreign countries. It is estimated that there are more than 8,000 medicolegal death investigators working in North America.

In February 2009, the National Academy of Sciences released their report, *Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States: A Path Forward*. The report noted that the forensic science community is plagued by poorly funded systems and inconsistent practices in federal, state and local crime laboratories and medicolegal offices. The Report emphasized the future needs of forensic science practitioners to include:

- mandatory professional certification for all practitioners;
- development of discipline-specific practice standards; and,
- high-quality education, training and continuing education opportunities should be available to all those working in the forensic sciences

The United States has two types of medicolegal death investigation systems: the coroner and medical examiner systems. The coroner is an elected official that is responsible for death investigations and administrative duties of his/her office. A medical examiner is often an appointed official who is an ABP board-certified forensic pathologist who oversees the entire death investigation process, handles administrative duties and performs autopsies for his/her office. Both groups currently have their own professional organizations that representing them – the International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (IACME) and the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME). Medicolegal death investigators may join both organizations but they are not the primary focus of either organization.

That is why The Society of Medicolegal Death Investigators has been created – to represent the medicolegal death investigator profession, its needs, and concerns.

The Society of Medicolegal Death Investigators (SOMDI) will be operational January 1, 2011. This will be a voluntary professional

membership organization specifically dedicated to medicolegal death investigators and the work they do investigating deaths for medicolegal offices. It will be an organization inclusive of all individuals currently employed as medicolegal death investigators in either medical examiner offices, coroner offices, equivalent military authority offices whose responsibility includes conducting death scene investigations and ABMDI certified individuals.

Organizational details will be presented including membership criteria, application information, organizational structure, contact and website information, training and educational opportunities, and annual meeting details, etc.

Society of Medicolegal Death Investigators, SOMDI, Medicolegal Death Investigators