



## Pathology Biology Section - 2012

### G100 Unknown Body Found in a Rug — Unraveling the Answers

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand challenges in death investigations to determine identity, cause of death, manner of death, time of death, and place of death require cooperation between a wide range of different disciplines.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by showing how the importance of cooperation between different forensic disciplines can determine the questions surrounding a death investigation.

**Introduction:** Death investigation seeks to answer several important questions—who, what, where, when, and how death occurred. This process often requires the concerted efforts of a wide range of specialized individuals. The gravity is even more pronounced in those cases which are suspicious for criminal activity. Death investigation is not directly related to the legal outcome of these cases, but does provide evidence which is used by the court of law in their independent assessment of the guilt or innocence of accused individuals.

**Case Presentation:** An unidentified, largely decomposed body was discovered wrapped in a rug and partially concealed in a public park in Wilkesburg, Pennsylvania in September 24, 2009. The circumstances of the discovery of the body, and the advanced state of decomposition with extensive insect activity significantly interfered with identification of the deceased; as well as determination of the time of death; the place that death actually occurred; and the cause and manner of death.

**Discussion:** The average person is unable to wrap themselves in a rug and tape the rug closed by themselves prior to their own death, suggesting that the deceased was placed in this position by additional person(s), who may or may not, have played a direct role in the death. At the very least, the actions of this additional person (or persons) led to the concealment of several points of interest within this investigation.

Identification of the cause of death could not be determined by autopsy, or toxicological studies of the physical remains. No bony injuries were visible either grossly or by radiological scans of the remains.

The identity of the deceased was successfully ascertained and required the efforts of a range of individuals. A chance event spared identifying features from decomposition on the left hand and wrist including a portion of a tattoo and a single intact fingerprint. The deceased had finger print impressions on record. Additionally, the identity was corroborated by forensic anthropology, and forensic dentistry. The details were complicated by incomplete dental records, lack of documentation of a wrist tattoo and a delayed missing persons report.

The time of death was investigated by the work of a forensic entomologist based on evidence found on the body and at the scene. The individual was last documented to be alive in February of 2009, and a missing person report was issued on July 4, 2009.

The location of death (and the eventual determination of both the cause and manner of death) required police investigation and trace evidence comparison. A vehicle was obtained with carpet fibers in the box compartment. These fibers were definitively matched to the rug in which the deceased was discovered and led to the residence of the owner of the vehicle. The residence contained a similar carpet with a portion removed which also matched the rug in which the deceased was found. A bullet hole was found in the floor area corresponding to the missing area of carpet.

**Conclusion:** The final report on the death involved a 36-year-old Black female found wrapped in a rug was determined to be due to a perforating gunshot wound of the chest with a manner of homicide. The identity of deceased was discovered, the place of death and an approximation of the time of death were found. The police investigation and trace evidence matching provided the final cause and manner of death.

The police report information on the case involves two men who hired a female sex worker. They claimed she robbed them and they re-acquired her, where upon she was shot. The body remained in the home for an unspecified period of time before she was taken to the park.

Multiple resources and specialists were required for the successful resolution of this difficult case.

#### **Homicide, Identification, Trace Materials**