G111 Automated Reporting System Increases Referral and Donors

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The goal of this presentation is to alert medical examiners, coroners, and organ procurement agencies of the benefits of automated reporting of potiential donors to local organ procurement agencies. This system saves time and organs.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by increasing organs for possible donation, complying with state statutes on reporting potential donors, and improving overall efficiency for medical examiners' and coroner's offices. This encourages improved data exchange between agencies which elevates the professional status of the forensic community.

As the number of accessible organs and tissues continues to remain insufficient to supply the current demand, deaths investigated by medical examiners' and coroners' offices may prove to be a significant source of viable organs and tissues; however, tighter budgets and increases in mandated reporting requirements have caused friction between many medical examiners'/coroners' offices and some organ procurement organizations. The need for collaboration and timely communication between these agencies is essential if each is to fulfill their responsibilities to the public and others who rely on their services. Although most states require medical examiners and coroners to report all deaths to the local organ procurement agency, many viable organs and tissues expire due to needless delays in notification, recovery, and procurement tasks. Although medical examiners' and coroners' offices have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on "state of the art" case management systems, most are antiquated before they "work," and rarely do these systems allow (or are capable of) communication with other data systems. Reporting and information exchange regarding potential organ and tissue donors is time consuming, inefficient, and typically done—by telephone—daily.

The Washtenaw County medical examiner office in Ann Arbor, Michigan, along with Occupational Research and Assessment (ORA) and Gift of Life Michigan, recently collaborated in the development of an automated reporting system for organ and tissue referrals. Washtenaw County uses the MDILog® web-based software service (developed by ORA) for its case management, both hospital (University of Michigan) and non-hospital medical examiner cases are entered in the system as they occur. Gift of Life traditionally contacts the Washtenaw medical examiner's office each morning to inquire about recent cases and their potential for referral. The goal of the system was to reduce medical examiner staff time in fulfilling the mandated reporting requirement and increase the number of referrals to Gift of Life Michigan and the number of cases that resulted in actual donated organs and tissue. In addition, the resulting data transfer protocol (schema) could be shared with anyone wishing to replicate the data exchange process with their own case management system and the state/local organ procurement organization they are required to report cases to.

The concept is simple: using the investigative data set, the Organ Procurement Organization (OPO) (in this study Michigan Gift of Life) identifies which case criteria are essential to initiate a case for procurement. If the investigators have the correct hardware (laptop/tablet with cellular connection), they are able to connect to the case management system and start processing the case immediately on arrival at the scene. Once (and if) OPO case data thresholds are met and saved, the data flows seamlessly (without humans in the loop) to the Gift of Life computer center where case screeners review case details (only essential data is viewable to OPO staff) and provide feedback to the investigator (hold or release), allowing medical examiner staff to coordinate timely release of the body to funeral directors or tissue procurement agencies. If the suspected cause and manner of death require additional forensic investigation and autopsy, the investigator simply checks a box informing the OPO of a medical examiner "hold" on the referred case.

In the first six months since going "live," the automated data exporting system has processed 56 totally automated referrals resulting in 8 additional tissue donors. Gift of Life concluded that: implementation of the program required a review of internal case processing procedures and that it is likely that two of the cases resulting in donation would have otherwise been lost due to unnecessary time delays. Automated data exchanging avoids duplication of effort, human error, and saves time and tissue.

Tissue Donors, Automated Reporting, Organ Procurment