



Pathology/Biology Section - 2016

H62 If at First You Don't Succeed...

Richard C. Fries, DO, 3741 Modlin Avenue, #2, Fort Worth, TX 76107; Tasha Z. Greenberg, MD, Tarrant County MEO, 200 Feliks Gwozdz Place, Fort Worth, TX 76104-4919; Nizam Peerwani, MD, Tarrant County OCME, 200 Feliks Gwozdz Place, Fort Worth, TX 76104-4919; and Allison Mautone, MD, 800 Cotton Depot Lane, #128, Fort Worth, TX*

After attending this presentation, attendees will be familiar with suicide cases by multiple gunshot wounds and the characteristics that distinguish these suicides from homicide cases.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by illustrating patterns observed in multiple gunshot wound suicides at the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office to assist with the evaluation of similar cases that are inherently suspicious for personnel involved.

Although there are several reports of suicide by firearm with more than a single wound path, these cases are inherently suspicious for everyone involved. A ruling of suicide as the manner of death is frequently met with resistance by law enforcement and especially family members. Misconceptions about the possibility, frequency, and lack of understanding of anatomy are major contributors to objections of a suicide ruling with multiple gunshot wounds. These factors may cause the manner of death to be undetermined, which may cause an underestimation of the incidence of cases of suicide by multiple gunshot wounds.

A retrospective analysis of suicides with multiple gunshot wounds over the past 12 years identified 20 cases. For the time frame analyzed, the overall firearm suicide rate was 49% with multiple gunshot suicides comprising 1.2% of this total. The firearm suicides were 84% men and 88% White; a breakdown of the demographic information on the multiple gunshot suicides determined the cases predominantly involved middle-aged White men. Scene investigation data reveals that these cases predominantly occurred at home or on the surrounding property and in less than half of the cases was a note discovered at the scene or any verbal admission of a self-inflicted wound made. Approximately half of the cases had a history of depression based on reported history or toxicology testing positive for antidepressant medication; previous suicide attempts were reported in none of the cases. Almost all of the firearms used were large caliber, with a small subset of cases involving the use of more than one firearm. The cases were predominantly composed of two gunshot wounds, although up to four gunshot wounds were observed. The vast majority of total entrance wounds were contact with few exceptions due to specific case circumstances. In terms of body region, the head was the most common target as both the only target and in combination with other body regions. The chest was the next most common target, with only a small number of cases involving the abdomen. Over the time frame analyzed, four years had no cases of multiple gunshot wound suicides identified and the years with identified cases all had similar numbers.

Suicide, Firearm, Multiple Gunshot Wounds