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### **E24 You Didn't Tell Me That! Thank You for Letting Me Know That! — The Importance of Evidence Recognition and Documentation of the Death Scene**

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After attending this presentation, attendees will learn the importance of law enforcement's description of the death scene during the initial death notification to the medicolegal office as it regards whether to release a scene or respond to a scene. Attendees will also understand the importance of evidence recognition and scene documentation in assisting the forensic pathologist in determining the manner and cause of death.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community, particularly medicolegal death investigators and law enforcement officers, by stressing the importance of communication and collaboration between these two professionals as well as evidence recognition, evidence collection, and documentation of the death scene.

Medicolegal death investigators receive death notifications not only from hospitals and nursing homes but also from law enforcement personnel who are present at a death scene. The death investigator triages these telephone calls to decide whether a scene response is necessary by asking the police officer such questions as when the decedent was last known alive, past medical history, and a description of the death scene. There may be instances when law enforcement may miss important scene details and the death investigator may release the case as non-jurisdictional or when the police officer describes crucial information about the death scene that initiates a response by the medicolegal death investigator.

Autopsies cannot be performed in a vacuum. Failure to have relevant information will result in misdiagnosis and possible issues with the integrity of the case. Medicolegal death investigators are observers for the forensic pathologist. It is imperative that the death investigator recognize evidence that helps the forensic pathologist determine manner and cause of death. This evidence may be of transient, functional, or unpredictable forms. Documentation of these types of evidence are documented through photographs and report narratives.

It is important that the death investigator receive accurate scene description from law enforcement. Receiving this information from police will help the death investigator make a determination as to whether to respond to a scene. Once an investigator is at a death scene, it is crucial that he/she recognize evidence and know how to collect and document it. This presentation will discuss these issues through a discussion of an ethylene glycol poisoning death, the hanging death of an 11-year-old, and an indoor hyperthermia death.

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#### **Notification of Death, Death Scene Investigation, Evidence Recognition**