



H28 The Implementation of a Quality Improvement (QI) Program for Death Scene Photography in a Medical Examiner Office

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After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand QI measures for performance of death scene photography and diagram documentation as performed at the West Tennessee Regional Forensic Center (WTRFC) in Memphis, TN.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by: (1) improving the attendees' knowledge of a QI project for death scene photography and diagram documentation; (2) teaching how to implement a QI project for death scene photography and diagram documentation; and, (3) reviewing death scene photography principles to improve investigator competence and performance.

In 2011, the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) published an updated guide; *Death Investigation: A Guide for the Scene Investigator*.¹ The publication describes topics of death investigation, including death scene photography. The publication states; "Photography allows for the best permanent documentation of the death scene. It is essential that accurate scene photographs are available for other investigators, agencies, and authorities to recreate the scene. Photographs are a permanent record of the terminal event and retain evidentiary value and authenticity. It is essential that the investigator obtain accurate photographs before releasing the scene."

This project will provide a retrospective review of a number of cases from 2016 at the WTRFC to determine if death scene photographs and diagrams adhere to the DOJ guidelines. Additionally, the scene photographs will be evaluated for focus/sharpness to adequately document a visual reproduction of the death scene. Twelve DOJ guidelines for death scene photography will be evaluated for each case and documented in spreadsheet format. For each case all 12 guidelines will be assigned "YES" or "NO," indicating case adherence status with that guideline. Photograph focus/sharpness will be subjectively evaluated and assigned "YES" or "NO," as well as recording the number of photographs in focus and out of focus in each case. Investigators responsible for taking the photographs in each case will be randomly assigned a letter (e.g., Investigator A, B) and that information will be kept confidential.

The significance of adequate death scene photography and diagram documentation is well established and clearly described in the DOJ guidelines. Photographs and diagrams should provide a visual reproduction of the scene such that evidence is preserved and evaluation of the photographs and diagrams provides the viewer with an accurate interpretation of the death scene. This project highlights the importance of evaluating death scene photographs and diagrams for adherence to DOJ guidelines within a specific medical examiner's office. The tabulation of data will enhance the development of a global death scene photography training plan and provide an evaluation process necessary for implementation of individual investigator performance improvement plans. Re-evaluation for adherence to DOJ guidelines and overall quality improvement will be performed after training as indicated by the outcome of this study.

Reference(s):

1. *Death Investigation: A Guide for the Scene Investigator*. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. Washington, D.C., 2011.

Death Investigation, Death Scene, Photography

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