



### H59 Suicides Using Atypical Methodology: A Case Series

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After attending this presentation, attendees will appreciate a wider range of suicidal methods, as well as the continued increase in the suicide rate in the United States.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by increasing awareness of atypical devices — a sports utility vehicle, a hospital call-button cord, a homemade floor-mounted stabilizer, a nail gun, a meat thermometer, and a combination of a rotary saw and a neck tie — that may be used in committing suicide.

Suicidal acts are the tenth leading cause of death in the United States. Since 2009, there has been an increase in suicides in nearly all age groups nationwide. Men most commonly commit suicide by firearms, while women most commonly use poison/intoxication. Asphyxiation, which includes hanging, strangulation, and suffocation, accounts for approximately one in four suicides for both males and females. Suicides under the “other” category include cutting/piercing, drowning, falls, and fire; these comprise approximately 7% and 9% of suicides for males and females, respectively. For both sexes, falls from a height were the most common “other” methodology. Nonetheless, various measures may be employed by either sex. Since 2009, the suicide rate in Maryland has remained relatively stable, ranging from 5.4%-5.8%. The most common method of suicide in Maryland from 2009 to present was by firearms. Asphyxiation accounted for approximately 35% of suicides in Maryland, higher than the national rate.

To date, there have been case reports of suicide achieved by devices ranging from manual and power drills to complex cases involving multiple methods at once with cutting of the wrists, electrocution, and drowning. Maryland, has had cases of suicide with devices ranging from a meat thermometer and nail gun to the combined use of a rotary saw and hanging.

This presentation presents uncommon means of committing suicide and the injuries associated with each, expanding the compilation of reported atypical suicides. Case 1 is that of a 40-year-old White male who used a rope, fire hydrant, and his jeep to achieve decapitation. Case 2 is that of a 21-year-old White male who used a rope attached to the front tow hook of his sports utility vehicle and a tree to hang himself. Case 3 is that of a 76-year-old White male who hung himself using a hospital call button cord and a hospital lift. Case 4 is that of a 52-year-old White male who constructed a wooden mount screwed to the floor to stabilize and aid in discharge of a shotgun. Case 5 is that of a 53-year-old White male who discharged a commercial-grade nail gun at his left temporal region. Case 6 is that of a 44-year-old White male who stabbed himself through the right temple with a meat thermometer. Case 7 is that of a 51-year-old White female who used a combination of a rotary saw and a neck tie to end her life.

Presented is a case series of multiple suicides implementing unusual and atypical devices. Suicides can be very controversial cases, often times with family members contesting or questioning the mindset of their loved one. This issue is compounded in cases implementing an atypical method. Thorough and adequate investigation of the scene and case is a vital component in the decision-making process of the forensic pathologist. Additionally,



## Pathology/Biology - 2017

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the autopsy results must corroborate the results of the investigation in order for the forensic pathologist to arrive at a determination of suicide. It is therefore essential that law enforcement and forensic pathologists be aware of atypical and rare techniques for committing suicide and consider suicide as a potential manner in such cases.

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### **Atypical Methods, Suicide, Device**