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### E21 The Evolving Suicide Note

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**Learning Overview:** After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the importance of social media and electronic devices as an evolving entity for medicolegal death investigation compared to the age-old method of examining handwritten suicide notes, offering important legal implications regarding the manner of death of suicide vs. homicide.

**Impact on the Forensic Science Community:** This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing a detailed review of data collected over a ten-year period (2007–2016), reviewing all cases in which the manner of death was documented as a suicide. Case-related data was also obtained from the Community Regional Medical Center in Fresno, CA, and is the only Level 1 Trauma Center between Sacramento and Los Angeles, thus treating and serving surrounding counties in Central California.

Most research regarding suicide and the notes left behind by the deceased begin by reviewing the medicolegal death investigation file, coroner's inquest, and/or medical examiner's report. Medicolegal death investigators are responsible for recording and documenting suicide notes found during their investigation. In this study, suicide notes were divided into media and non-media types. Non-media suicide notes are handwritten. Media suicide notes are generated by a computer, cell phone, audio, video, social media platform (i.e., Facebook), or any other type of electronic communication device, and whether the suicide note, if left on a cellular phone, was a text message or an instant message.

This research project had four objectives to determine if there were notable difference between non-media and media suicide notes and how the notes were left. Objective 1 was to determine if people are leaving significantly less non-media suicide notes compared to media suicide notes. Objective 2 was to determine if younger people are leaving significantly more media suicide notes than older people. Objective 3 was to see if there is a significant increasing rate of media suicide notes over each year for the past ten years. Objective 4 was to determine if personal cell phones are the main source for leaving media suicide notes compared to all the other electronic devices

Of the 881 total suicide victims, 212 left a suicide note (24%). Out of the 212 suicide notes left, 162 (76%) were non-media notes and 54 (24%) were media suicide notes. Of the media suicide notes left, 87% were left by cell phone over the entire ten-year span of collected data. However, in 2007–2011, 17 media suicide notes were left, and from 2012–2016, 37 media suicide notes were left, reflecting an increase of 217%. Although the suicide note rate has remained relatively consistent over the ten-year span, the frequency of social media notes has increased when compared to non-media suicide notes over the most recent five-year time frame.

These results show that media suicide notes are being left in a higher frequency than non-media notes and that cell phones are the preferred mode of leaving these notes. This apparent change over the manner in which suicide victims convey their innermost thoughts to those left behind may be indicative of the population statistics that showed in 2016, 28.6% of the population were under 18 years of age and 11.8 % were 65 years and older, with 59.6% between these age groups. Thus, the use of social media for leaving behind suicide notes, by a younger population more familiar with the internet and those tools, would not be unusual. It also suggests that there may be suicide ideations on the social media links.

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### Suicide Notes, Investigation, Forensic Sciences