



H43 Mississippi Organ and Tissue Recovery: A Collaborative Success Story

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand organ and tissue recovery rates and trends in a state with a mixed death investigation system (i.e., coroner and medical examiner).

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by discussing the history of organ and tissue recovery in Mississippi and providing the results of collaborative efforts on recovery rates.

Prior to 2011, the recovery rate of organs and tissues from coroner death investigations throughout the state of Mississippi was extremely low. The abysmal recovery rate was due to a statewide lack of knowledge and education among the county coroners, combined with a lack of cooperation from the non-board-certified pathologists who performed the autopsy examinations. Denials were frequently attributed to interference from the pathologists, who informed the county coroners that organ and tissue recovery would hinder or preclude their ability to determine the cause and manner of death of the potential donor patient. This flawed practice continued throughout the state for nearly 30 years.

In 2011, the Mississippi Department of Public Safety implemented a State Medical Examiner's System and began hiring only board-certified forensic pathologists. Soon thereafter, the State Medical Examiner's Office established communications with the Mississippi Organ Recovery Agency (MORA). The two agencies developed a relationship patterned after the guidelines set forth in the corresponding position paper (National Association of Medical Examiners 2014). The collaboration led to the establishment of a Medical Examiner Referral Process and an on-scene referral process to assist the coroner with potential referrals of patients who would not likely be transported to the hospital or State Medical Examiner's Office.

MORA is one of 58 federally designated organ procurement organizations. The agency utilizes iTransplantSM, a web-based clinical management and communications software system that is widely available on hand-held and other electronic devices. The donation and transplantation platform provides rapid information gathering and exchange between multiple agencies including the medical examiner's office.

Over the past several years, the State Medical Examiner's Office and MORA have combined their efforts to educate and train the county coroners regarding the importance of organ and tissue recovery. These efforts have demonstrated to our local coroners and district attorneys that organ and tissue recovery essentially has no negative effect on the determination of cause or manner of death of a potential donor patient. As a result of collaborative efforts and coroner education, MORA has observed nearly a 10% increase in patient referrals in addition to a significant decrease in cases declined by the coroner. It is expected that the recovery rate will continue to increase.

Organ Recovery, Tissue Recovery, Collaborative Effort