



K81 Next-Generation Drug Surveillance in Public Health and Medicolegal Death Investigations

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will have an understanding of federal- and state-level efforts to enhance and implement drug surveillance programs to strengthen investigations involving drug-related deaths in the United States and promulgate information about the needs of the Medicolegal Death Investigations (MDI) community to facilitate their work. Attendees will also have gained evidence-based knowledge regarding infrastructure-related challenges faced by medical examiners, coroners, and their forensic laboratory services; acquired perspectives about lessons learned from local, state, and federal efforts working with and within the MDI community; and learned about resources that are in place to overcome some of these obstacles, including tangible resources, changing laws, and advances in technology, science, and availability of key data.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating how these national and state-wide data can improve our understanding of the state of medicolegal death investigation systems, highlighting valuable tools for public safety and public health, and sharing of these analytical data can facilitate comprehensive public health and death investigation efforts.

Investigations of drug-related deaths in the United States is at an unsurpassed critical “breaking point” that calls for enhanced, integrated sentinel drug surveillance efforts. Many surveillance efforts at a federal and state level are progressively relying on multidisciplinary teams to evaluate emerging drug trends; historical, current, and potential patterns of abuse; safety or dependence liability; public health risks and lethality; and analytical characteristics.¹

In 2015, nearly 2.5 million people died in the United States.² Of these, approximately one million were referred to the nation’s Medical Examiner and Coroner offices (MECs), which accepted about half of these cases.³ MEC caseloads are at an all-time high because many of these deaths require a complex, in-depth investigation.⁴ Drug overdose deaths require significant resources to investigate, and the exponential escalation of drug-related deaths in the United States have led to national efforts to implement more effective and timely awareness of the epidemiology, drug statistics, and unprecedented challenges that burden MECs. In general, there is limited information about the state of the MDI community on a national scale concerning drug surveillance.

Several national MDI stakeholder meetings have focused on multiple federal and state agency efforts within the MDI community. It is important to highlight what these agencies are doing, how their work ties together and how they are collaborating, and how MDI practitioners are finding value in and implementing better practices using data from these efforts.

In summary, this special session will discuss the needs, progress, and current programs that will assist the forensic science community in achieving the next generational advancement of drug surveillance in MDIs.

Reference(s):

1. DEA, Controlled Substances Act, Section 201 (c), [21 U.S.C. § 811 (c), 2015.
2. CDC WONDER, 2017.
3. National Science and Technology Council, 2016.
4. CDC NVSS, 2016.

Drug Surveillance, Drug Overdose, Medicolegal Death Investigations