



## H155 Pull It Out or Leave It In? Foreign Bodies Discovered During Medicolegal Death Investigation

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**Learning Overview:** The goal of this presentation is to employ case examples to emphasize the importance of applying a multidisciplinary approach in death investigations in which foreign bodies are present as well as to highlight the potential confusion caused when implements are removed and not properly documented prior to the involvement of the Medical Examiner's or Coroner's Office (MEO).

**Impact on the Forensic Science Community:** This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating the vastly variable scenarios death investigators experience with the goal of promoting the importance of multiagency communication. The intended result is to instill within attendees a level of caution and consideration when responding to death scenes where foreign objects are present.

Although the characteristics of penetrating wounds can support a determination of what implement caused it, leaving impaled foreign objects *in situ* obviously decreases any potential confusion regarding the implement that can arise. Through a review of six case examples, this presentation will address a series of four considerations from the MEO perspective for outside agencies to review when handling cases with foreign bodies found impaled or inserted into human remains, including during first response. More specifically, the question of scene and responder safety, the importance of documentation, the value in keeping items *in situ* to avoid confounding confusion, and how all of these items come together to support considerations for cause and manner of death will be reviewed.<sup>1-6</sup>

**Case 1:** A 28-year-old male and his brother were in a verbal altercation during which the decedent's brother stabbed the hilt of a handmade metal sword into the decedent's head.

**Case 2:** A 63-year-old female was found deceased in her yard with polytrauma, including a knife stuck in her buttock.

**Case 3:** A 46-year-old male was witnessed to go unresponsive at home during sexual intercourse. An anal plug had been inserted with consent by his wife and remained *in situ* upon the arrival of the MEO.

**Case 4:** A 23-year-old female was stabbed multiple times by her Significant Other (SO). The SO reported that she'd been seated, he'd been standing over her and holding their infant at the time of the stabbing. The knife had been left in the decedent's body by the suspect. However, upon arrival, medics reported noting signs of life so they removed the knife and set it aside to facilitate resuscitative efforts.

**Case 5:** A 32-year-old male was found unresponsive at a bus stop lying in a fetal position. The circumstances surrounding his being there were unclear until the decedent was rolled during his external exam and a syringe was found *in situ* in his arm.

**Case 6:** A 41-year-old male driving a stolen vehicle at slow speeds lost control of the vehicle, which then struck a chain link fence and a utility pole. The top rail of the fence was displaced and impaled the decedent through the mouth and exited through the back of the head.

Reconstruction of injury patterns and determining their instrument of creation is imperative to determining cause and manner of death in cases of penetrating trauma. A thorough death scene investigation includes a multiagency discussion, especially when attempts at lifesaving efforts were made and the original scene was disturbed. In this presentation, it will be suggested that the best way to avoid the potential for confusion in death investigations is to have a set protocol when interacting with first responder agencies in cases where foreign bodies are present.

### Reference(s):

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### Foreign Objects, Impale, Postmortem Artifact