

# Understanding the Role of Medical Examiners in North Carolina

Duties and interaction with the local health departments and registrar

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## Overview

- ◆ Define & discuss the role of the Medical Examiner in NC.
- ◆ What types of referrals are made and how is it determined who is autopsied?
- ◆ Discuss the paperwork requirements for exam and reporting purposes.
- ◆ Discuss the relationship of the ME to the OCME, county & state Vital Stat/Registrars and the Health Departments.

## Definition

The county medical examiner is an officer of the State of North Carolina, charged with the duty of investigating and certifying specified categories of human deaths in North Carolina. A medical examiner's authority derives from Article 16 of Section 130A of the North Carolina General Statutes. His/her primary purpose is to detect, analyze, and document the medical aspects of certain types of deaths so that deaths can be better understood scientifically, legally, and socially.

## Deaths reported to ME

- ◆ Homicide
- ◆ Suicide
- ◆ Accident
- ◆ Trauma
- ◆ Disaster
- ◆ Violence
- ◆ Unknown, unnatural or suspicious circumstances



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## Deaths reported to ME continued

- ◆ In police custody, jail or prison
- ◆ In state-operated mental health facilities
- ◆ Poisoning or suspicion of poisoning
- ◆ Public health hazard (such as acute contagious disease or epidemic)



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## DITTO, DITTO

- ◆ Deaths during surgical or anesthetic procedures
- ◆ Sudden unexpected deaths not reasonably related to known previous disease
- ◆ Deaths without medical attendance



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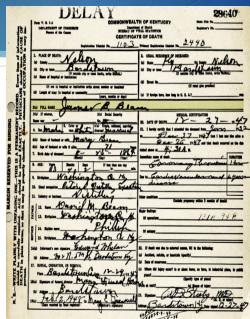
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And also we.....

- ◆ Consult with law enforcement agencies on all relevant deaths.
- ◆ May have to investigate a death after the body has been buried or cremated.
- ◆ Prepare the death certificate & report of investigation



New office  
OCME

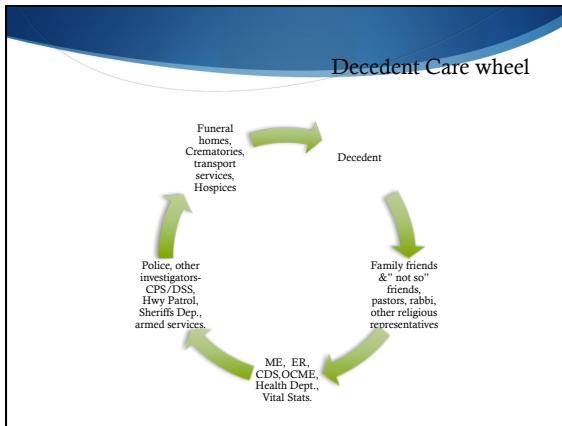
Tim McNeal  
Dr. Radisch  
Jacque Perkins  
Rick Miller



Once ME determines the body  
is under ME jurisdiction...

- ◆ The ME must personally view every dead body over which he/she assumes jurisdiction.
- ◆ Obtain a medical and social history to help explain the cause and manner of death.
- ◆ ME does external exam if not sent for autopsy.





**REPORT OF INVESTIGATION BY MEDICAL EXAMINER**

NCMIS USE ONLY

DECEDENT: \_\_\_\_\_

RESIDENCE: \_\_\_\_\_

SEX: \_\_\_\_\_

AGE: \_\_\_\_\_

RACE:  Black  Native American  Oriental  White  Unknown

HISPANIC ORIGIN:  Yes  No  Unknown

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ TIME: \_\_\_\_\_ ADDRESS OR FACILITY: \_\_\_\_\_ COUNTY: \_\_\_\_\_

VIEW OF BODY:  Scene of death  Hospital  Funeral home  Other \_\_\_\_\_

ME NOTIFIED:  Doctor  Hospital  Other \_\_\_\_\_

LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY: \_\_\_\_\_

LAST KNOWN TO: \_\_\_\_\_

DEATH:  Carried while in custody  Yes  No  Unknown

AUTOPSY:  None  M.E. Authorized  Non-M.E. Autopsy facility  Reason not given: \_\_\_\_\_

BLOOD SAMPLE:  Obtained by pathologist  Reason not given: \_\_\_\_\_

CLINICAL ALCOHOLIC: DONE, REQUESTED, OR BY WHOM: \_\_\_\_\_

POTENTIAL CAUSE OF DEATH:  Pending

1.  Homicide  Suicide  Accident  Pending

2.  Homicide  Suicide  Accident  Pending

3.  Homicide  Suicide  Accident  Pending

4.  Homicide  Suicide  Accident  Pending

CONTRIBUTING CONDITIONS:  Natural  Accident  Homicide  Suicide  Undetermined

REVIEW:  Initial  Subsequent  Final

Information in this block represents that contained in a report of death.

OCME REVIEW:  1.  Death to  None  2.  Death to  None  3.  Death to  None  4.  Death to  None

CONTRIBUTING CONDITIONS:  Natural  Accident  Homicide  Suicide  Undetermined

REVIEW:  Initial  Subsequent  Final

Information in this block represents that contained in a report of death.

3 pages long

Prepared and sent Within 14 days to the OCME.

ME Report of Investigation

Signature of Medical Examiner \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Courtesy of Apptee \_\_\_\_\_ M.E. Number \_\_\_\_\_

**MEDICAL HISTORY**

Alcoholism  Diabetes  IV drug abuse  Ischemic heart disease  Smoking

Severe disorder  Cancer  Hypertension  Depression  HIV/AIDS

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Attending Physician: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_

**MEANS OF DEATH**

Vehicle: Type of vehicle associated with death:  Passenger car  Pickup truck  Truck-more than 2 axles  Motorcycle

Bus  Train  Airplane  Boat  Ship  Other

Position:  Driver  Passenger  Pedestrian  Unknown

Device:  Seat belt/restr  Air bag  Helmet  Child restraint  None  Unknown

Number of passengers: \_\_\_\_\_

Gun:  Rife/Carb  Handgun/Cali  Shotgun/Gauge \_\_\_\_\_

Gun:  Blunt  Sharp  Drowning

Alcohol:  Yes  No  Unknown

Drowning:  Pond  Lake or river  Ocean  Pool  Bath tub  Other

Drowning:  Yes  No  Unknown

Other:  Yes  No  Unknown

Activity:  Smoking:  Yes  No  Unknown

Fire: Suspected cause: \_\_\_\_\_

Fall:  Yes  No  Unknown

Fall:  Yes  No  Unknown

**ACTIVITY OF DECEDENT AND PREMISES**

**FATAL INJURY** Activity: \_\_\_\_\_ Type of place: \_\_\_\_\_ Specific location: \_\_\_\_\_

Past injury or illness associated with a job:  Yes  No  Unknown

If yes, was employee:  Primary job  Secondary  Other

Name of employer/firm or agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of business (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

Decedent's occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

**DEATH** Type of place: \_\_\_\_\_ Specific location: \_\_\_\_\_

Example: Running, lifting, heavy labor, racing, racing motor, driving commercial truck, driving, helping, watching television, fighting, etc. The following are examples of activities associated with a job: Farming, mining, lumbering, quarrying, construction, industrial work, specific location, business, business, society, law, kitchen, food and office, parking, emergency room, medical, ambulance, car, etc.

**DESCRIPTION OF BODY**

CONDITION:  Inert  Decomposed  Embalmed

Embalmed  Charred  Prolonged immersion  Exhumed

ROCK:  None  1+  2+  3+  4+

LIVOR:  None  Anterior  Posterior  Latral

HEIGHT: \_\_\_\_\_ inches  Estimate  Estimate  Estimate

WEIGHT: \_\_\_\_\_ pounds  Estimate  Estimate

BODY TEMPERATURE:  Warm  Cool  Cold

HAIR Color: \_\_\_\_\_

EYES: Color: \_\_\_\_\_

ABNORMALITIES:  Normal  Deform  Abnormalities

ERTIC: Upper:  Normal  Deform  Abnormalities

Lower:  Normal  Deform  Abnormalities

CLOTHING:  Normal  Deform  Abnormalities

VALUABLES:  Normal  Deform  Abnormalities

Non-clad  No valubles

Measure

Photograph

Question findings

Abuse/injuries  
Not consistent  
With story

BODY DIAGRAMS

The figure consists of two diagrams: a front view and a back view of a human body. In the front view, there are four vertical measurement lines: one on the chest, one on the abdomen, one on the upper leg, and one on the lower leg. There are also two horizontal measurement lines: one across the chest and one across the abdomen. In the back view, there are three vertical measurement lines: one on the upper back, one on the lower back, and one on the upper leg. There is also one horizontal measurement line across the lower back.

Indicate nature and location of wounds and other traumas (cuts, abrasions, medical therapy, etc.) in these diagrams.

# Who should be evaluated for autopsy?

## Who should be autopsied? Continued.....

- ◆ Sudden unexpected deaths where the decedent does not have a well documented illness that would explain death.
- ◆ Suspicious or contested suicides.
- ◆ Accidental deaths where the observable injuries do not appear sufficient to explain death or seem inconsistent with the alleged "accident"

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## Continued who should be autopsied?

- ◆ Possible public health hazard.
- ◆ Law enforcement insistence.
- ◆ Badly burned charred bodies where ID may be an issue.
- ◆ Skeletonized remains
- ◆ Badly decomposed remains
- ◆ Reasonable suspicion that trauma may have been the cause or a contributing cause.
- ◆ Apparently natural deaths in known alcoholics and drug abusers.
- ◆ Travelers, vacationers, convention attendees, workers, students

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## Interaction with County Registrar/vital stats office

- ◆ Local vital stats/record offices are located in County Health Departments.
- ◆ Local registrars review death certificates from all parties for completeness and compliance with NC State Death Registration Guidelines.
- ◆ Correct errors prior to sending to the State to be registered.
- ◆ If error is missed and needs to be corrected after the fact very \$.
- ◆ Refer for review to the ME any medical death certificate that they deem possibly should have been ME case.

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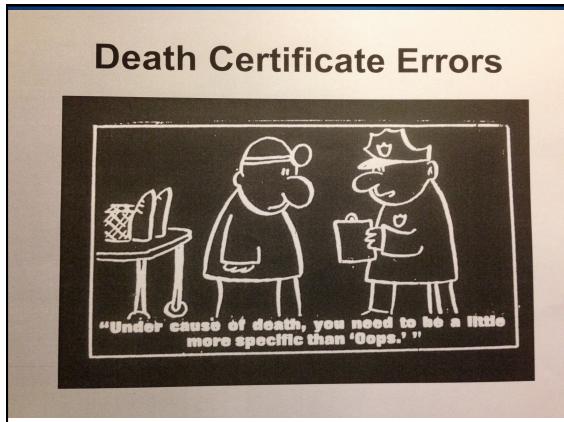
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## ME interaction with County Health Departments:

- ◆ A decedent is referred to the ME because he/she did not have a primary care physician.
- ◆ Our investigation may reveal that the decedent did at one time attend the county clinic (family planning, STD).
- ◆ ME's participate in Health Department tasks force/committees: Guilford County Child fatality review team and Child trauma task force.

## Reflection: Caring for the dead

“Show me the manner in which a nation or community cares for its dead, and I will measure with mathematical exactness the tender sympathies of its people, their respect for the laws of the land, and their loyalty to high ideals.  
( Gladstone )

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## Contact information

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