

OSCME NEWSLETTER

OSCME Update

The OSCME staff would like to thank all of those investigators, county medical examiners and office staff who have registered in our Interim Case Management System, I-MED and are currently entering 'Reports of Investigation.' We could also like to thank all of those who are sending us copies of all ROIs via mail, fax and e-mail. Collecting more reports will allow for a more accurate first annual report of death investigation in Tennessee. We will begin a rough draft of the report in a few weeks with a plan to include information for 2017 with statistics for the state (and in some instances by county). This report should provide officials and others with information showing the large number of cases being investigated by CMEs and CME-Is throughout the state. Those registered in the system have access to information in the system for their county. If you are not registered, it is not too late, just go to https://apps.health.tn.gov/Medical_Examiner/ or you can contact our office at toll-free 844-860-4511 for assistance.

The OSCME is moving forward with the process of obtaining a more robust statewide case management system and is currently in the process of reviewing and evaluating proposals. Once a decision is made, this new system will take several months to implement. Data already in our current system will be uploaded into the new system.

The OSCME has completed four of the six scheduled two-day training sessions funded by a grant awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs (USDOJ). Comments have been very positive for the program "Bats, Clubs, Knives and Murder . . . Or Not."

The last two sessions are scheduled, and registration is still open for:

McMinn County—April 19 & 20, 2018

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/bats-clubs-knives-and-murder-or-not-tickets-37845054577>

Cove Lake—May 2 & 3, 2018

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/bats-clubs-knives-and-murder-or-not-tickets-37847633290>

Funding has been approved for a new 2018-2019 program and planning for topics and sites has begun.

One of the goals of the OSCME for this year is to update the 'State Mass Fatality Plan.' Sections are being rewritten and updated making it more consistent with the way deaths are normally investigated in Tennessee, including jurisdictional authority and more details as to the roles and responsibilities of CMEs and regional forensic centers. We have the first draft ready for review and discussion by the working group composed of representatives from state agencies, regional forensic centers and county medical examiners. If you have any suggestions or specifics that you think should be included, please

contact our office by e-mail or phone.

The next meeting for the Medical Examiner Advisory Council is scheduled for April 13, 2018. If you have topics or issues you would like the council to discuss, e-mail the current president, Dr. Darinka Mileusnic at:

Darinka.Mileusnic@knoxcounty.org.

The current state legislative session is winding down. The OSCME has followed and provided information for several bills throughout the session, but there have been no changes which significantly impact death investigation.

The OSCME staff is available to answer your questions and assist you in locating information concerning death investigations, reporting, death certification, toxicology interpretation and other concerns. Call 844-860-4511 or e-mail at Health.OSCME@tn.gov.



Attendees in small groups working through their virtual scene case during the Montgomery Bell two-day, USDOJ sponsored, training, 'Bats, Knives, Clubs and Murder . . . or Not.'

The OSCME website (<https://www.tn.gov/health/health-program-areas/oscme.html>) includes a fillable cremation permit, a request for medical records template, and training and continuing education event schedule.

INFORMATION

Electronic Death Certification Update

Thanks to the early adopters of the system, approximately 50% of all death certificates are fully paperless as of this writing. Physicians, including many medical examiners and other high-volume certifiers, report that after a short learning period, the cause and manner of death can be entered and certified in two or three minutes. Modifications and improvements are continually being implemented based on feedback from both funeral homes and medical certifiers.

Non-medical examiner certifiers are only allowed to select “Natural” or “Pending” as the manner of death, pursuant to the Post Mortem Act and the Vital Records Act (TCA 38-7-101 *et seq* and 68-3-501 *et seq*). This will improve the quality of our death data, as many non-medical examiners do not have access to police reports and other documents necessary to fully complete the death certificate, as well as prevent cases needing investigation from escaping the attention of the county medical examiner.

Use of the system by medical certifiers will become mandatory July 16, 2018. The Office of Vital Records encourages you to register for and begin using the system prior to the cut-off period in order for you to receive optimal customer service.

A user agreement form, frequently asked questions and user manuals are available at <https://www.tn.gov/health/health-program-areas/vital-records/vrism.html>. The help desk number and email address are 1-855-874-7876 and health.vrism@tn.gov.

Multiple training modalities, including in-person and online, are available at times amenable to your schedule. Email Susan.Vacek@tn.gov to schedule training sessions.

The Office of the State Chief Medical Examiner has personnel who have been

trained to use the system and can help answer questions county medical examiners have about using the system. Contact us at 1-844-860-4511 or health.OSCME@tn.gov.

Drowning Deaths

The CDC reports¹ in the United States ten people die from unintentional drowning every day and of these, two are children aged 14 or younger. Drowning is the leading cause of unnatural death among children 1-4 years old, with most drownings occurring in home swimming pools. Overall drowning ranks fifth among the leading causes of unintentional injury death in the United States.

As the weather warms people in Tennessee will be returning to the water and the risk of accidental drowning death increases as the number of people in and around the water increases. Drowning deaths can occur while people are at work or at play in and around lakes, ponds, rivers, and swimming pools. It is important to remember drowning, particularly in young children, may also occur in small shallow collections of water; bathtubs, coolers, and buckets.



The diagnosis of drowning is a diagnosis of exclusion based on the circumstances surrounding the death in combination with the absence of any contradictory findings at autopsy. Information obtained during the scene investigation is crucial to the correct determination of drowning as the cause of death because findings at autopsy are often minimal and non-specific. A complete autopsy is recommended in cases of suspected drowning.

Consider the following in the investigation of drowning deaths:

- Is it logical that the decedent was in the water?
- Do findings at the scene and on the body make sense with the history (wetness of body, injuries or lack of injuries, postmortem changes, etc.)?
- How was the body found? Floating? Submerged? How deep is the water where the body was recovered?
- Could the decedent swim? How well?
- Did the decedent have a history of seizures or cardiac conditions? Is there a family history of sudden death?
- What is the type of body of water? Lake? Pool? River? What are the conditions of the water, including temperature, waves, and currents? Document weather at the time (electrical storms, etc.).
- Are there any sources of electricity that could have made contact with the water?

<https://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/water-safety/waterinjuries-factsheet.html> accessed 03/27/18

<https://www.watersafetyusa.org/>

MEDICAL EXAMINER SPOTLIGHT

Meet Your Fellow County Medical Examiner Investigator: **Danny Cupples, EMT-P, D-ABMDI, Medicolegal Death Investigator for Maury County**

In this newsletter we would like you to meet Danny Cupples, a paramedic and medicolegal death investigator in Maury County. Danny, through MTSU's Center of Health and Human Services (CHHS), Prevention Through Understanding program, assists in training first responders, firefighters and law enforcement as part of their continuing training requirements on handling cases of sudden, unexplained infant and child death and the importance of being sensitive to the grief of family members (T.C.A. §68-1-1102). The Prevention Through Understanding program, which uses a train-the-trainer model, was standardized in 2004 and to date, has trained more than 27,000 throughout the state of Tennessee. Online training is available at no cost at <http://www.sidstrainingtn.com/>.

Danny Cupples has first-hand knowledge of what a family experiences with the loss of an infant. In his training Danny tells the story of his sister and her 5-month-old son Adam who passed away suddenly in 2007 with no obvious explanation. Danny says, "The loss of Adam is one reason I decided to work hard to find out how we can prevent more children from dying. Because most infant deaths are preventable – that's the sad thing. Infant deaths are decreasing primarily because we're finding out the causes. And by finding out the causes, we can actually prevent more deaths from happening."



Danny Cupples, EMT-P, D-ABMDI

Describe your background: I was born in Jackson, Tennessee and am the son of a police officer. My career in EMS began in 1989 and in 2006 I began investigating deaths with the Maury County Medical Examiner's Office. I am one of approximately 50 Registered Diplomates of the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI) in Tennessee.


How did you get interested in being an MDI? While a paramedic supervisor I was asked by my employer to also work as a county medical examiner investigator and that was the start of my passion, I couldn't stop learning. I attended the basic class in St. Louis and have attended two Master's classes since that time. I was one of the lucky few chosen to attend all three of the New York classes; basic death investigation, advanced death investigation and bloodstain pattern analysis. Since then I have taught several classes in investigating deaths. I was the state's first Chief Death Investigator, although it was short-lived.

What do you feel is the biggest obstacle in performing your MDI duties? One of the primary obstacles in the field of death investigation is the pay. It just doesn't pay enough for me to do it full-time, being humble while saying this, I have been sought after by forensic centers but the low pay keeps me from fulfilling my dream of working full-time in death investigation.

What is your opinion of the ongoing efforts of the OSCME? I believe the OSCME is doing an outstanding job with training and the willingness to reach out to any with needs.

What is one random fact about yourself that you would not mind being published? I love fishing, hunting and golf and all sports especially football and hockey (Go Preds). I love to sing and play an instrument but I've been practicing for 50 years and yet to accomplish that one.

Current I-MED Data Collected	
Total I-MED Users	219
Total ME Cases Reported	22703
ME Cases Reported 2018	2227
Total Autopsies 2018	538
% of ME Cases Reported 2018	24.16
Jurisdiction Declined 2018	604
% of ME Cases Reported 2018	27.12

	Department of Health Authorization No. 343592 Number of copies, 0. This public document was promulgated at a cost of \$0.00 per copy. March 2018
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