

Tennessee Medical Examiner Advisory Council
Friday, April 13, 2018, 1:00 P.M. - 3:01 P.M. CST

MEMBERS	REPRESENTATION	STATUS
Darinka Mileusnic, M.D., Ph.D.	Forensic Pathologist Forensic Center	Present
Bob Batson	Licensed Funeral Director	Present
Julia Goodin, M.D., M.P.A.	State Chief Medical Examiner	Present
Honorable Amy Weirich	District Attorney General	Not Present
Tony R. Emison, M.D.	County Medical Examiner (West TN)	Present
Dewayne Johnson	Assistant Director of the TBI	Present
Ed Miller, J.D.	District Public Defender	Not Present
Lorraine MacDonald, M.D.	County Medical Examiner (Middle TN)	Telephonic
Benjamin Figura, Ph.D.	Admin Regional Forensic Center (West)	Telephonic
Matrina Schmidt, M.D. for E. Hunt Scheuerman, M.D.	Forensic Pathologist Forensic Center	Telephonic
Feng Li, M.D., Ph.D., J.D.	Forensic Pathologist Forensic Center	Present
James Metcalfe, M.D.	Forensic Pathologist Forensic Center	Present
Marco Ross, M.D.	Forensic Pathologist Forensic Center	Telephonic
David D. Darden, D.O., M.P.H.	County Medical Examiner (East TN)	Present
Mayor Jake Bynum	Weakley County Mayor	Present
NON-MEMBERS	REPRESENTATION	STATUS
Adele Lewis, M.D.	Deputy State Chief Medical Examiner	Present
Margaret A. Hyder, M.A.	Deputy Director	Present
Frances Wheatley, M.A., ABMDI-F	State Medicolegal Death Investigator	Present
Andrew Wilson, B.S., ABMDI-F	State Medicolegal Death Investigator	Present
GUESTS	REPRESENTATION	STATUS
John Lott, R.N., M.S.	Knox Regional Forensic Center	Present

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 P.M. on Friday, April 13, 2018 in Conference Room A, 5th Floor, Andrew Johnson Tower.

1:00 P.M. **1. Roll Call and Voting**

Dr. Mileusnic welcomed the council and requested introductions from each member, their names and representations. All council members were present in-person or telephonic, except for General Weirich and Public Defender Ed Miller. Dr. Darden moved to approve the minutes from January 19, 2018, which were electronically distributed prior to the meeting, Bob Batson seconded the motion and the minutes were approved by unanimous vote of “Yea.”

1:05 P.M. **2. State Medical Examiner Office Update:**

Dr. Goodin gave a presentation to the council on the progress of the Office of the State Chief Medical Examiner (OSCME). The OSCME will continue to provide the two-day grant funded death investigation training: Bats, Clubs, Knives, and Murder... or not? Four of the six training sessions have occurred, with great improvement displayed in pretest versus post-test scores. The office has continued providing the “Death Investigation 101” one-day basic training program for county medical examiners and death investigators. Dr. Mileusnic commented on the effectiveness of the training based on the improvements she’s seen in her region. Dr. Goodin advised the council that the OSCME has published six newsletters, available on the state website. The OSCME is staying actively involved in the development of VRISM. Dr. Darden commented on the prompt response time he’s received from VRISM.

The OSCME is approaching the final stages of revising and updating the state mass fatality plan. Additional meetings are in the process of being planned.

1:16 P.M. **3. Legislation:**

Dr. Mileusnic reviewed bills passed and in the process of being passed in the house and senate.

- **HB1775** allows TBI to send a designee to the council meetings. Council agrees all members should be able to send designees when they are unable to attend.
- **HB1550** modified the NAME accreditation requirement for forensic centers to allow for additional forensic centers to open in the state with the increased demand.
- **HB2190** Classifies as 2nd degree murder the killing of another by unlawful distribution or unlawful delivery or unlawful dispensation of fentanyl or carfentanil.
- **HB2360** Commissioner provides legislation suggestions. With regard to making autopsy reports private, Dr. Mileusnic gave an example of a recent case where the autopsy report being a public record was damaging to the family of the decedent (boxing match), and perhaps more families will be willing to testify in favor of making reports private during the next legislative session.
- **HB2560** Clarified the suicide bill is restricted to suicides. Several members commented on the increase in “Undetermined” manners of death, as this legislation undermines the training and knowledge of forensic pathologists, as well as medical examiners.

1:27 P.M. **4. VRISM:**

Several issues were brought up regarding certifying death through VRISM. Dr. Mileusnic brought up the obstacles the forensic centers face when trying to certify deaths for counties, which they are not the medical examiner, but performed the autopsy. In addition, funeral homes are assigning “clinician” instead of “medical examiner” in some cases. Bob Batson advised he will talk to the funeral homes regarding death certificate assignments. Another issue faced is the fact that the locations of funeral homes in VRISM need to be up to date, or all certifiers should have access to a generic funeral home box, when a funeral home is not in the system.

Dr. Lewis provided an update to the council:

- 52% of death certificates are entered electronically as of last week.
- Version 32, when released, will allow assignment of cases to specific physicians.

Dr. Metcalfe asked if a physician is assigned in VRISM, can the medical examiner change the assignment from physician to medical examiner, which was not possible. Dr. Lewis advised the council that the state will initiate weekly calls with VRISM for medical examiners starting next week.

1:44 P.M. **5. Funding and Succession (Open Discussion):**

- **Funding:** Dr. Mileusnic starts the discussion with the lack of a statewide succession plan for medical examiners as they age out of the role. Many county medical examiners serve their counties at no cost from a sense of civic duty, and as these county medical examiners age

out of the role it is unlikely new physicians will be willing to work for little to no money. Dr. Darden suggests wealthier counties should cover a larger share of the cost than poor counties. Mayor Bynum acknowledges the lack of funding for the medical examiner system, but also advises the small population of rural counties and the disdain by the population with regard to raising property taxes. Dr. Darden remarks on the increase in autopsies compared to prior years due to the increase in drug overdose deaths, but every death should get the same level of investigation. Dr. Darden suggests the surplus the state has obtained from attracting industry should be given to the poor counties for the medical examiner system. Dr. Emison suggests the systems the medical examiners are helping are not supporting the medical examiners. Dr. Mileusnic suggests a regional concept for medical examiners. Dr. Darden suggests using the judicial districts as medical examiner districts. Dr. Darden suggests the council compile documentation of the funding for each county medical examiner for the council to use to acquire more funding from the state.

- **Cremation Permits:** Dr. MacDonald mentions that some medical examiners are charging up to fifty dollars to sign cremation permits, which would significantly increase her salary. Dr. Darden does not believe medical examiners should charge for cremation permits. Dr. Mileusnic brings up the fact that the state charges twenty-five dollars for cremation permits, so the medical examiner should be able to charge also.
- **Proper Death Certification:** Dr. Mileusnic suggests the state should be more diligent in teaching proper death certification, as proper death certification is crucial to public health.
- **Organ Procurement:** The council discusses the Uniform Anatomical Gift Act in Tennessee, and need for legislative change. Forty-seven out of fifty-two states and districts that adopted the uniform anatomical gift act provide medical examiner facilitation, Tennessee being one of the five that does not.
- **Mental Disorders on Death Certificates:** Dr. Darden discusses listing mental disorders on death certificates, such as depression or schizophrenia. Dr. Mileusnic and Dr. Li agree that mental disorders are a factor in determining manner of death, though the council does not unanimously agree these disorders should be listed as the cause of death.
- **Bereavement Services:** Dr. Mileusnic showed the council a brochure from a local bereavement system, Katerpillar Kids Camp, a free grief camp provided by Covenant Hospice.
- **Prescription Drugs:** Dr. Darden thinks more should be done in eliminating the pill mills in the state, and CSMD should include methadone. Dr. Schmidt advises that in previous offices she's worked, they had contact with all of the methadone clinics to provide them records when a death was suspected from methadone, sometimes this required involvement with the district attorney.

2:53 P.M.

6. Council Wrap-Up:

- Dr. Mileusnic asked the council to send any suggestions or ideas for the next meeting. The next meeting of the council was set for July 13, 2018 at 1:00 P.M. Future meetings listed below:
 - July 13, 2018 - 1:00 CST - Andrew Johnson Tower, 5th Floor, Conference Room A
 - October 19, 2018 - 1:00 CST - Andrew Johnson Tower, 5th Floor, Conference Room A