

# IACME *news*

A Publication of the Iowa Association of County Medical Examiners

SUMMER 2010

*Read about the  
2009 IACME Fall Meeting  
and Education Expo  
(and your new IACME  
officers and board)*

—page 2



*Update from the  
Iowa Chief State Medical  
Examiner's Office*

—page 3



*Upcoming meetings,  
how to join IACME  
and more*

—page 4

## ***Survey of Iowa's county medical examiners reveals common concerns, challenges***

**A** survey conducted by the Iowa Association of County Medical Examiners shows that Iowa's county MEs face challenges on multiple fronts. They are concerned over the need for more training for new MEs, inequities in payment and a myriad of other issues. The vast majority said they were recruited or pressured into accepting the position.

Though several physicians cited the IACME Fall Meeting as a good source of education, there is a general desire for more continuing education. Many respondents said they would seek additional training if their counties contributed toward the cost and they had back-up coverage for the time away. Because so few county MEs sought the position and because payment for county MEs is largely inadequate, the ability and willingness of these physicians to seek education is understandably reduced.

A majority of respondents are satisfied with their relationship with the State Medical Examiner's office. Several said they appreciate the assistance of the

IOSME on difficult cases. Several respondents said communication from the IOSME is poor and cited problems with timely return of autopsy results, cost/inconvenience of transporting bodies to Ankeny and attitudinal issues.

Based on survey responses, it appears there are some similarities among counties with regard to the medical examiner system. In the "typical" county, bodies are transported by the local funeral director or by hospital ambulance. In the "typical" county, some autopsies are done locally and others by the State ME or elsewhere. The vast majority of respondents are satisfied with autopsy services provided in their counties.

A question regarding fees paid for autopsies and death investigations garnered 55 responses. Thirty-nine respondents said they receive a fixed

*Last July, IACME conducted a survey of Iowa's county medical examiners; 65 physicians responded. Many physicians offered comments which help us understand the issues faced by county MEs. To request an emailed copy of the full survey results, email [meservices@q.com](mailto:meservices@q.com).*

*continued page 4*

***Save these dates!***

**IACME 2010 Fall Meeting and Education Expo**  
Fri. & Sat., Nov. 5-6 • Sheraton, West Des Moines

## IACME 2009 Fall Meeting and Education Expo a success

The I-35 bridge collapse, adolescent suicide, commonly misdiagnosed farm injuries and video car crash recorders were on the agenda at a meeting of the Iowa Association of County Medical Examiners (IACME) Friday and Saturday, November 20-21, 2009 in West Des Moines.

The IACME Fall Meeting and Education Expo drew 125 county medical examiners, law enforcement officials, attorneys and death investigators from around Iowa. The goal of this annual event is to provide continuing education for professionals who investigate automobile fatalities, murders, suicides, accidents and other deaths in Iowa.

Attendees heard an overview of death investigation in Iowa from Julia Goodin, MD, Iowa Chief State Medical Examiner, and a presentation on death investigation from a public health perspective by Tom Newton, MPP, director of the Iowa Department of Public Health.

The group also elected officers and board members at the meeting. The new IACME president is Thomas Carroll, MD of Sioux City. Barbara Harre, MD, Davenport, was elected vice president and Dan Cole, MD of Fort Dodge is the new secretary-treasurer.

Marcus Nashelsky, MD, Iowa City; Dennis Crabb, MD, Denison and Sheila Holcomb, MD, LeMars were elected to two-year terms on the IACME Board of Directors.

At the Iowa Association of County Medical Examiners Fall Meeting and Education Expo November 20-21, 2009, Immediate Past President Dennis I. Mallory, DO (left) received a plaque from President Thomas Carroll, MD, honoring him for longtime service to the group.



### *IACME web site, newsletter*

The Iowa Association of County Medical Examiners Board of Directors has approved two new ways of communicating with IACME members. This is the inaugural issue of *IACME News*, which will be published quarterly as a member benefit. Also, IACME has launched its new web site, [iacountyme.org](http://iacountyme.org). Though some sections of the web site are available to anyone, special educational information on the web site will be available only to IACME members.

### *Investigator board seat*

A new investigator board seat will be added to the IACME Board of Directors under a plan approved by the board at a November 20, 2009 meeting. The investigator board member will function as a regular board member but will not be eligible to hold office. Iowa death investigators who are members of IACME are eligible for the board seat. Following the November meeting, IACME President Thomas Carroll, MD appointed Staci Olson, RN of Fort Dodge to serve as interim investigator member until a regular election can be held at this November's Fall Meeting and Education Expo.

# Budget cuts, possible layoffs challenge the IOSME

State budget cuts will affect the Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner (IOSME) this year, Chief Medical Examiner Julia Goodin, MD told IACME members at the IACME November, 2009 meeting.

Funding of the IOSME has been cut to 2006 levels. All staff will take seven unpaid "furlough" days in 2010, and there may be staff layoffs at the end of June.

Beginning in June, there will be no autopsies at the IOSME office on holidays and may be no autopsies on Sundays. Bodies will be accepted and released on holidays and investigators will be available.

Dr. Goodin said state funding of Child Death Review Teams has been eliminated and management of the teams given to IOSME. The teams will meet as needed, rather than four times annually.

At the request of county MEs, the Preliminary Autopsy Results form has been updated. This is the form MEs can use to update their contact information if they wish to be

## *Issues that necessitate contact from IOSME*

- Incorrect manner of death
- Placing "mechanism of death" as "cause of death" on the form
- Failure to autopsy suicides

informed of autopsy results as soon as the autopsy is completed.

IOSME is also working with the Department of Vital Records on a rule change that will allow county MEs to get copies of death certificates in time to complete cremation permits.

Dr. Goodin reported that the IOSME's county visitation program has been very successful. Any ME who wants IOSME staff to visit their county may call IOSME.

The IOSME is working on several initiatives designed to support county MEs:

- A new form is available on the IOSME web site for requesting approval of a new investigator or

deputy medical examiner.

- IOSME has obtained funds to send county MEs to the St. Louis course. A scholarship application is on the IOSME web site.

- IOSME is seeking a rule change that would eliminate the registry requirement in sparsely populated counties where investigators can't get the required number of cases to take the exam.

## *Iowa Association of County Medical Examiners*

### **PRESIDENT**

Thomas Carroll, MD, Sioux City

### **VICE PRESIDENT**

Barbara Harre, MD, Davenport

### **SECRETARY-TREASURER**

Daniel Cole, MD, Fort Dodge

### **PAST PRESIDENT**

Dennis I. Mallory, DO, Toledo

### **BOARD MEMBERS**

Dennis Crabb, MD, Denison

Sheila Holcomb, MD, LeMars

Paul Jensen, MD, Cresco

Marcus Nashelsky, MD, Iowa City

Greg Schmunk, MD, Des Moines

### **INVESTIGATOR BOARD MEMBER (Interim)**

Staci Olson, RN, Fort Dodge

### **EX-OFFICIO**

Michele Catellier, MD, Des Moines

Julia Goodin, MD, Des Moines

Dennis Klein, MD, Des Moines

Jerri McLemore, MD, Des Moines

Jonathan Thompson, MD, Des Moines

### **ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF**

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## IACME, IOSME support new prescription drug record requirements

Members of IACME have voted to support a proposal aimed at reducing the number of Iowa deaths from prescription medication overdose. Iowa Chief State Medical Examiner Julia Goodin, MD, said prescription overdoses are increasing in Iowa. She urged IACME support of a resolution asking the Iowa Legislature to make available to physicians electronic records of all prescriptions filled through their benefit programs.

The resolution was scheduled to be introduced at the April, 2010 Iowa Medical Society House of Delegates meeting.

## Survey of Iowa's county medical examiners, *from page 1*

fee per case, but there appears to be significant disparity in the amount of the fee. Sixteen physicians are paid annually, monthly or through some other arrangement.

Following are some of the comments written in response to the question *What aspect of the ME role do you find particularly challenging?*

- "Knowing what is an ME case and what is not."
- "Knowing which cases the state wants."
- "Major trauma, suicide."
- "Homicide scene investigation."
- "Cause of death determination, legal concerns, time called to death location."
- "Lots of unknowns in declaring cause of death."
- "Infant deaths are always a challenge."
- "Time of death."
- "Whenever foul play is suspected I feel inadequate."
- "Toxicology issues. Also maintaining chain of evidence for samples in a rural county."
- "Investigating scene, determining time of death."
- "Dealing with families at times. Variety of emotions associated with death of loved one."
- "Correlating and gathering info, time, expertise required."
- "Interruption from usual office duties to do ME duties is challenging."
- "Time constraints."
- "Still want to find time for courses."
- "I feel totally untrained."
- "Minimal training (1 hour) and only partial case before I had one myself."
- "Appropriate documentation, finding balance between appropriate autopsies and cost to county."
- "Cooperation with county attorney and investigators in understanding each other's roles — I need to back up doctor when away!"
- "All aspects are challenging. I received no training in performing the role of medical examiner."

## Why Join IACME?

The Iowa Association of County Medical Examiners is the primary source of information and education for anyone involved in death investigation in Iowa. As an IACME member, you will pay a reduced rate to attend the IACME Fall Meeting and Education Expo. Held each November in Des Moines, this event brings together county medical examiners, law enforcement, funeral directors, attorneys and other professionals from across Iowa. Attendees consistently praise this conference as a source of valuable networking and practical information on death investigation.

IACME members receive *IACME News*, which contains current news and information for county MEs and investigators and have access to *iacountyme.org*, the IACME web site.

Any physician who serves as a state, county or deputy county medical examiner in Iowa is eligible for **Full Membership** in IACME. County medical examiner investigators are eligible for **Investigator Membership**. Physicians, law enforcement officers, public officials and employees, attorneys, funeral directors and other professionals with an interest in death investigation are eligible for **Associate Membership**.

A membership application is available online at *iacountyme.org* or by calling 515.957.9246.

## Upcoming Events

### National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) Annual Meeting

Friday, Oct. 1 - Wednesday, Oct. 6, 2010  
Renaissance Cleveland Hotel, Cleveland, Ohio  
Further information available at *www.thename.org*.

### 2010 IACME Fall Meeting and Education Expo

Friday and Saturday, Nov. 5-6, West Des Moines Sheraton

### 2011 IACME Fall Meeting and Education Expo

Friday and Saturday, Nov. 4-5, West Des Moines Sheraton

### 2012 IACME Fall Meeting and Education Expo

Friday and Saturday, Nov. 2-3, West Des Moines Sheraton