

IACME *news*

A publication of the Iowa Association of County Medical Examiners

WINTER 2011

*IACME elections and
the new Investigator
Board member
—page 2*

Another successful IACME Fall Meeting



A RECORD CROWD attended the IACME Fall Meeting and Education Expo November 5-6, 2010. Here, attendees view a presentation by Dr. Dennis Klein on firearm deaths in Iowa. See story p-2.

More Death Investigators in Iowa

The increase in the number of investigators in Iowa has led to “major improvements” in death investigation, according to Iowa’s Chief State Medical Examiner Dr. Julia Goodin.

In a report to the 2010 IACME Fall Meeting and Education Expo, Dr. Goodin said there are now 191 death

investigators in Iowa; 22 are certified by the American Board of Medico-legal Death Investigators.

Dr. Goodin reported that confusion over ‘cause of death’ and ‘manner of death’ continues to be the source of common errors on medical examiner forms. Medical examiners sometimes list the cause of death as heart failure,

continued on page 3

Welcome
IACME

2010
Fall Meeting
AND
Education
Expo

*County MEs learn about
changes to Iowa’s
death certificate
—page 3*



*Upcoming meetings,
new UI staff member
—page 4*

This newsletter is a benefit of your IACME membership

Have you paid your dues for 2011? Check iacountyme.org for a member list

IACME Fall Meeting a success

County medical examiners, death investigators and other Iowa professionals attended the 2010 IACME Fall Meeting and Education Expo Friday and Saturday, November 5-6 in West Des Moines. Friday's programs included a presentation on firearm deaths and an optional course for new medical examiners and investigators. Dr. Dennis Crabb, Crawford County Medical Examiner and IACME Board Member, discussed medical triage following the tornado at the Little Sioux Scout Camp. Chris Luhning, Parkersburg Chief of Police, discussed disaster response following the Parkersburg tornado in 2008.

Friday evening, attendees enjoyed a banquet and a presentation on the Lincoln assassination by Dr. Blaine Houmes of Cedar Rapids. Saturday's program included revisions to the Iowa death certificate and a presentation on forensic toxicology by Dr. Robert Palmer of Denver, Colorado. ♦



From left, newly-elected IACME Board Members Dr. Paul Jensen, Michael Hensch and Dr. Greg Schmunk. At right is IACME President Dr. Tom Carroll.

New investigator board seat filled

Two incumbents and one new board member were elected to two-year terms during the IACME Fall Meeting November 5-6.

Michael Hensch, Iowa City, was elected to fill a new investigator board seat on the IACME Board of Directors. Hensch is administrator of the Johnson County Medical Examiner Department. He has a BA in law enforcement from Drake University and an MA in public affairs from the University of Iowa.

He is certified by ABMDI.

Drs. Greg Schmunk and Paul Jensen were re-elected to the IACME Board. Dr. Schmunk has been Polk County Chief Medical Examiner since 2004. He earned his medical degree from the University of Southern California and did a residency in anatomic pathology at the University of Washington. He has been chief medical examiner for Santa Clara County in San Jose, California and Chief Forensic

Pay your IACME dues by March 31!

At its November 5 meeting, the IACME Board reaffirmed existing dues payment policy. Anyone who has not paid 2011 dues by March 31, 2011 will not be eligible for the member discount when registering for the 2011 IACME Fall Meeting, even if dues are paid after March 31. The Board affirmed this existing bylaws policy on advice of attorneys exploring the IACME structure and legal status.

The 2011 IACME Fall Meeting and Education Expo will be Friday and Saturday, November 4-5 at the Sheraton West Des Moines. Registration fee for physicians is \$225, and \$325 for non-member physicians. Registration fee for associates is \$150, and \$250 for non-member associates. IACME dues are \$75 for physicians and investigators and \$65 for associates.

Pathologist in Modesto, California. His fields of interest include wound pattern interpretation, child abuse and firearm injuries.

Dr. Paul Jensen has been an IACME member since 2001. He practices at the Cresco Medical Clinic in Cresco and has been the Howard County Chief Medical Examiner for eight years. Dr. Jensen earned his medical degree and PharmD from the University of Nebraska. ♦

Iowa's Certificate of Death has been revised

Changes to the Iowa Certificate of Death in effect January 1 will ensure that Iowa death certificates are an accurate source of information, according to Victoria Hutton, liaison for the IDPH Bureau of Vital Records.

“Death certificates are used for insurance benefits, to transfer property titles and to provide legal

evidence of death,” Hutton told attendees at the IACME Fall Meeting last November. “It’s a vital source of mortality statistics that determine which medical conditions receive research funding.”

If research funds are to be properly allocated, medical examiners must provide accurate information about the cause of death. The

underlying cause of death is the disease or injury that led to the death, Hutton emphasized.

A condition can be listed as “probable” if not definitely diagnosed.

On the revised death certificate, there is space to list the date of onset for each cause of death.

continued on page 4

IOSME Staff Available for County Outreach

John Kraemer, Director of Forensic Operations, Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner, visited 39 Iowa counties last year, providing guidance and training to new county medical examiners and investigators. He assisted with review of operational policies and procedures, drafted and reviewed county disaster plans and provided interpretation of Iowa Code governing death investigations. If you would like Mr. Kraemer to visit your county, call at 515.725.1400 or email him at jkraemer@idhp.state.ia.us.

More Death Investigators in Iowa

continued from page 1

multisystem failure or congestive heart failure without listing an underlying cause.

Another common error is listing cancer as the cause of death and failing to specify the type of cancer.

Dr. Goodin advised that strangulation should not be used as the cause of death in hangings. The correct term is asphyxia due to hanging. The Iowa Vital Records Department can reject cause of

death statements for these and other errors, said Dr. Goodin.

She reminded county medical examiner investigators that autopsy is required in all suicides and farm-related deaths.

In 2009, county medical examiners investigated 4,543 deaths, or 16 percent of total Iowa deaths last year.

Autopsies were requested in 1,391 deaths in 2009. ♦

Iowa Association of County Medical Examiners

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A form for requesting approval to appoint Deputy County Medical Examiners and Investigators is now available on the state medical examiner web site (www.idph.state.ia.us/do/medical_examiner.asp).

Death Certificate revisions

continued from page 3

“Unknown” or “approximately” are acceptable entries if the date of onset is unknown.

“The date of onset may not be the same as the date of diagnosis,” Hutton added.

“The death certificate is a vital source of mortality statistics.”

When cause or manner of death cannot be determined without further investigation, enter “pending.” If no clear answer emerges after investigation, enter “could not be determined.”

If autopsy reveals a cause of death that differs from the cause of death listed on the death certificate, the medical examiner can provide a supplemental report.

Hutton also advised:

- Items 24-49 on the Certificate of Death are the responsibility of the medical examiner. Funeral directors and county registrars have been advised that they do not have legal authority to complete missing information.
- No alterations, abbreviations, erasures or whiteouts; sign your name legibly, in ink.
- Place of death refers to where the person was pronounced dead.
- Both the date and time pronounced dead and the actual or presumed date and time of death must be listed, even if they are the same.
- PAs, LPNs, RNs and ARNPs can pronounce death, but an MD or DO must certify the death.
- If the person pronouncing death is not the certifier, the person’s name, title and license number must be completed.
- Nurses who pronounce death must add their name, title and license number to the report submitted to the physician. The Board of Nursing says there should be no concern over providing license numbers. License numbers are public information, and the question on the death certificate is relevant, according to the Board. ♦

New UI faculty member

Dr. Dennis Firchau has joined the faculty of the UI Department of Pathology as Clinical Assistant Professor of Anatomic Pathology. Dr. Firchau’s



Dr. Dennis Firchau

clinical duties and interests include autopsy and forensic pathology, cardiovascular pathology and medical education. Dr. Firchau received his medical degree from Wayne State University in 2004. He completed a pathology residency at the Medical College of Wisconsin in 2008 and a cardiovascular pathology fellowship at Mayo Clinic in 2009. Most recently, he completed a forensic pathology fellowship at the Hennepin Medical Examiner’s Office. ♦

Upcoming Events

2011 IACME Fall Meeting and Education Expo

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

2012 IACME Fall Meeting and Education Expo

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

2011 St. Louis University Death Investigator Training

March 14-18, 2011 and August 13-19, 2011

Grant funding is available. For more information, contact: John Kraemer, Director of Forensic Operations
Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner
515.725.1400 or jkraemer@idph.state.ia.us

American Academy of Forensic Sciences Annual Meeting

February 21-26, 2011

Hyatt Regency Hotel, Chicago

Further information available at www.aafs.org.

National Association of Medical Examiners Interim Meeting

February 22, 2011

Hyatt Regency Hotel, Chicago

Further information available at www.thename.org.

National Association of Medical Examiners Alaska Cruise

August 6-13, 2011

Scientific program: “Controversies in Forensic Pathology”
Further information available at www.thename.org.