

# IACME news

A publication of the Iowa Association of County Medical Examiners

FEBRUARY 2012



*Dr. Carroll honored for service as IACME president, officers elected —page 1*

July 2011- present

CERTIFICATE OF DEATH	
31a. MEDICAL EXAMINER CONTACTED? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
31b. If Yes, M.E. case number	

*Special Q & A on the revised Iowa death certificate —page 2*



*IACME Board Member elected VP of NAME —page 4*

## ***IACME 2011 Fall Meeting—quality education for Iowa death investigators***

**T**he IACME Fall Meeting and Education Expo Friday and Saturday, November 4-5 in West Des Moines drew a record number of county medical examiners, death investigators and other professionals involved in death investigation.

Attendees heard presentations on electrical fatalities, the biology of substance abuse in forensic settings, cardiac death in the young, Iowa's revised death certificate and an unusual pediatric death.

Julia Goodin, MD, Iowa's Chief State Medical Examiner, gave an overview of activities in her office.

On Friday morning, the IACME Board met with Mariannette Miller-Meeks, MD, Director of the Iowa Department of Public Health, to discuss issues of mutual concern.

At the IACME Annual Banquet Friday evening, Robert Monserrate, a criminalist with the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation, gave a presentation on dealing with the stress of death investigation.

Also at the banquet, Dr. Thomas Carroll, Sioux City, was honored for his years of service as IACME President and on the IACME Board.

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## ***ABMDI Certification is a commitment to excellence and professionalism***

by Michael Hensch, MA, F-ABMDI

**M**edical Examiner Investigators (MEIs) are required by Iowa law to obtain certification at the registry level as a death investigator within five years of appointment. MEIs are certified through the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI).

The certification demonstrates that

the MEI has obtained specialized knowledge and demonstrated proficiency in the standards and practice necessary to competently perform job duties. ABMDI recognizes two levels of certification. The **Registry** level certifies the MEI has acquired basic knowledge and

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***This newsletter is a benefit of your IACME membership***

Have you paid your dues for 2012? Check [iacountyme.org](http://iacountyme.org) for the member list

# Revisions to Iowa's Death Certificate

## Q & A with Dennis Klein, MD, IOSME

*Dr. Klein is Deputy Chief State Medical Examiner with the Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner. He serves on the board of the Iowa Association of County Medical Examiners.*

### **Who decided to revise Iowa's death certificate, and why?**

The Iowa Bureau of Vital Statistics is responsible for drafting and adopting revisions to the Iowa Death Certificate. Iowa traditionally adopts changes that reflect recommendations of the National Center for Health Statistics. The Iowa Bureau of Vital Statistics also reviews and adopts changes specific to Iowa. Historically, major revisions occur about every 10 years. The January, 2011 revision followed this time interval. The July, 2011 revision reflected changes in items specific to Iowa.

### **What problems have arisen with the revised death certificate?**

Confusion about what information the certificate requires and difficulty finding the new information are the biggest problems. Documenting the person who pronounced death is new, and is information death certifiers have not had to deal with in the past. In many cases, this information is difficult to find or not present in the records available to the medical examiner. It requires time, phone calls and searching in the medical records.

“Actual” date and “actual” time (boxes 29 and 30) are terms that have little meaning to the medical examiner outside a controlled medical setting. Unless a medical person is present at the time of death, there is no reliable finding or test to determine “actual” time of death, only estimates. We have adopted the practice of using the pronounced time of death on official documents such as the death certificate. When the death occurs outside of a medical institution, using the prefix “pronounced” or “found” helps clarify confusion.

### **Who can legally declare death in Iowa? Is this a change?**

It is important when completing death certificates to understand the difference between “pronouncing” death and “certifying” the death. Pronouncement of death is the medical process of determining that a person is, in fact, dead. In Iowa, any physician with a MD or DO degree and holding a valid medical license may pronounce death. Licensed Physician Assistants, Registered Nurses, Nurse Practitioners and Licensed Practical Nurses may

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### **Which death certificate boxes have been revised?**

- Boxes 24-30 — date and time death was pronounced; name, title and license number of the person who pronounced the death; the “actual” or “presumed” date and time of death.
- Boxes 31a and 31b — medical examiner contacted, if contacted, and an ME case number (either ME-1 number or autopsy number.)
- Box 35 — tobacco use and contribution to death.
- Box 43 — transportation cases, indicating driver, passenger or pedestrian.

## **IACME Board approves first dues hike in 10 years**

At its November 4, 2011 meeting, the IACME Board approved a dues hike of \$25 for each dues category. IACME dues have not been raised since 2001, and this is just the second dues hike since IACME was founded in 1996.

The new rate is \$100 annually for physicians and investigators and \$90 annually for associates.

Please remember to pay your IACME dues by April 1, 2012 in order to be eligible for the member discount for the 2012 IACME Fall Meeting and Education Expo.

IACME membership has increased significantly during the past three years. ♦

## Death certificate revisions, *continued from page 2*

pronounce death if the death was anticipated and occurred in a hospital, hospice or nursing care facility. EMS providers can pronounce death at a scene under the direction of their medical directors.

Certifying a death is the process of determining the cause and manner of death and completing and signing the medical portion of the death certificate. Any death that occurs in a manner that is not natural must be certified by a medical examiner. Natural deaths may be certified by any licensed physician (MD or DO). An Advanced Registered Nurse Practitioner or Physician Assistant may certify deaths

that are natural in manner, if the patient was under their care.

### **Are there plans to further revise the Iowa Death Certificate?**

Iowa is evaluating and planning for an electronic death certificate and Electronic Death Registry (EDR). When this system is implemented, there will be changes in format and in the information required. Other revisions to the Iowa certificate can be expected when the National Center for Health Statistics publishes the latest version of the US Standard Certificate of Death. ♦

*Call the IOSME, 515.725.1400, with questions about revisions in the Iowa Death Certificate or determining 'cause' and 'manner' of death.*

## IACME Fall Meeting and Education Expo, *from page 1*

He received a plaque from Dennis I. Mallory, DO, past IACME President. IACME elections were held on Saturday. Barbara Harre, MD, Davenport, is the new IACME president. Paul Jensen, MD, PharmD, Cresco was elected Vice President. Dan Cole, MD, Fort Dodge, was elected Secretary-Treasurer. Elected to the

Board were: Dennis Crabb, MD, Denison; Sheila Holcomb, MD, LeMars; Dennis I. Mallory, DO, Toledo; and Marcus Nashelsky, MD, Iowa City. All offices and board seats carry two-year terms.

Mark your calendars now for the 2012 IACME Fall Meeting to be held November 2-3 at the Sheraton West Des Moines. ♦

### **ELECTED TO THE IACME BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Pictured at right are: (front row) Sheila Holcomb, MD, LeMars, Board Member; Dennis I. Mallory, DO, Toledo, Board Member; (back row) Dennis Crabb, MD, Denison, Board Member and Barbara Harre, MD, Davenport, IACME President. Also elected to the IACME Board were Paul Jensen, MD, PharmD, Cresco, Vice President; Dan Cole, MD, Fort Dodge, Secretary-treasurer; and Marcus Nashelsky, MD, Iowa City, Board Member.



### **Iowa Association of County Medical Examiners**

#### **PRESIDENT**

Barbara Harre, MD, Davenport

#### **VICE PRESIDENT**

Paul Jensen, MD, PharmD, Cresco

#### **SECRETARY-TREASURER**

Daniel Cole, MD, Fort Dodge

#### **PAST PRESIDENT**

Thomas Carroll, MD, Sioux City

#### **BOARD MEMBERS**

Dennis Crabb, MD, Denison  
Sheila Holcomb, MD, LeMars  
Dennis I. Mallory, DO, Toledo  
Marcus Nashelsky, MD, Iowa City  
Gregory Schmunk, MD, Des Moines

#### **INVESTIGATOR BOARD MEMBER**

Mike Hensch, MA, F-ABMDI, Iowa City

#### **EX-OFFICIO**

Michele Catellier, MD, Des Moines  
Julia Goodin, MD, Des Moines  
Dennis Klein, MD, Des Moines  
Jonathan Thompson, MD, Des Moines

#### **ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF**

Cheri Jensen  
Chris McMahon Sutton

#### **IACME**

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## ABMDI certification

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skills necessary to conduct thorough and scientific medicolegal death investigations. The **Board Certified** level means the MEI has demonstrated mastery of all aspects of death investigation. In Iowa, 33 MEIs are certified medicolegal death investigators — 29 have Registry status and four are Board Certified.

Why should all practicing MEIs in Iowa work toward certification? It is required by Iowa law. It demonstrates commitment to competence and professionalism. Due to the influence of high profile criminal trials and television shows, the public expects death investigators to perform on a par with large city medical examiner offices. The National Research Council of the National Academy of Science has issued recommendations to reform forensic science, including mandatory certification and accreditation programs. Also, the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) has endorsed the NRC recommendations.

Begin the certification process by logging on to <http://medschool.slu.edu/abmdi> for an application request form. The application fee is \$50. The ABMDI will send you a packet containing the necessary forms. To be eligible to take the certification exam, you must complete the forms and provide documentation that you have 640 hours of death investigation experience. The fee for the examination is \$350. The test may be taken at a local college or university testing center.

If you have questions, contact the ABMDI or one of your 33 MEI certified colleagues in Iowa. Their names and offices are listed on the ABMDI web site. John Kraemer, PA, F-ABMDI, Director of Forensic Services in the Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner, is the current president of the ABMDI. ♦

*Michael Hensch is a Medical Examiner Investigator with the Johnson County Medical Examiner Department and serves on the IACME Board of Directors.*

## Dr. Schmunk is new VP of NAME

Gregory Schmunk, MD has been elected vice president of the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) for 2012. He takes office this month. Dr. Schmunk has been Polk County Medical Examiner since 2004. He has served on the NAME Board of Directors since 2002 and has been on the NAME Executive Committee since 2007.



Gregory Schmunk, MD

“My election as vice president of NAME is a humbling honor which allows me to serve not only Polk County but also the nation as decisions are made which will have an enormous impact on the practice of death investigation,” says Dr. Schmunk.

Dr. Schmunk serves on the IACME Board of Directors. ♦

## Upcoming Events

### 2012 IACME Fall Meeting and Education Expo

November 2-3, 2012, Sheraton West Des Moines

### St. Louis University Death Investigator Training

March 12-16, 2012 and August 6-10, 2012

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](mailto:jkraemer@idph.state.ia.us)

### American Academy of Forensic Sciences Annual Meeting

February 20-25, 2012

Atlanta Marriott Marquis

Atlanta, Georgia

Further information available at [www.aafs.org](http://www.aafs.org).

### National Association of Medical Examiners Interim Meeting

February 21, 2012 in conjunction with the American Academy of Forensic Sciences meeting in Atlanta, Georgia. The program is entitled “Death Investigation and the Feds.”

Further information available at [www.thename.org](http://www.thename.org).

### 2013 IACME Fall Meeting and Education Expo

November 15-16, 2013, West Des Moines Marriott