



# Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner Newsletter

Issue Number 5

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## Grant Money Available for Death Investigation Training!

The Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner is once again fortunate to have received Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Act Grant funding through the Governor's Office of Drug Control Policy.

For 2009, we again would like to send 10 individuals to the Medicolegal Death Investigator Training Course, which is to be held during the week of April 20-24. This course is hosted by the Saint Louis University School of Medicine's Division of Forensic and Environmental Pathology in St. Louis, Missouri. Grant funds to attend this course will be given to six county medical examiner investigators and four county medical examiners or deputy medical examiners. To view the training course content, go to the following Web site: [medschool.slu.edu/mldi/](http://medschool.slu.edu/mldi/).

The application and instructions for the Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Act Grant are now available on the Iowa Department of Public Health's Web site. To download these materials please go to [www.idph.state.ia.us](http://www.idph.state.ia.us). Then click on "Grants, Bids and Proposals" and search for the grant by name. All applications are due into the Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner by 4:00 PM on February 2, 2009.

If your county is selected, money from the grant will be reimbursed to the county after the individual has returned from the training course. The lump sum amount of \$2,190.00 will be reimbursed to the county for each individual that attends the course. This amount is to be applied toward the course registration fee, travel, lodging, and meals. Expenses over the allotted reimbursement amount need to be covered by the county or individual chosen to attend this training. Please carefully read and follow the instructions for completion of the grant application.

If you have any questions pertaining to this grant, please contact John Kraemer at 515-725-1404 or via e-mail at [jkraemer@idph.state.ia.us](mailto:jkraemer@idph.state.ia.us). Good luck!



## Indemnification of County Medical Examiners and Staff

As stated in Iowa Administrative Rules 641-127.11, "A board of supervisors shall defend, hold harmless, and indemnify a county medical examiner and any *properly appointed* staff members to the extent provided in Iowa Code chapter 670." It is imperative that when county medical examiners add deputy medical examiners and/or medical examiner investigators they follow the appointment and approval process accordingly. Failure to follow the appointment/approval process may allow for an opportunity or an "excuse" to not indemnify medical examiner personnel. To appoint a deputy medical examiner or investigator, the county medical examiner must request approval of appointment of any new staff members by their county board of supervisors and then must ask for final approval of the new appointments from the Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner. Please contact John Kraemer, PA for further information or if you need any assistance in appointing new county medical examiner staff.



## Scene Photographs

By Natalie Thomas

Scene photographs are an essential part of a thorough death investigation. They provide useful documentation and information about the body's environment, condition and position.

Basic scene photographs should have at least three kinds of images taken: overall, intermediate and closeup. It is an accepted rule of thumb to start general and end with the more detailed images. Try to take the photos as you approach the scene/evidence; don't just start with the body.

The overall photographs are used to show the entire area around the body. These are the most general photos. An example of an overall would a photo be showing the entire outside of a house or car, or a wide shot of a field.

As you get closer to the decedent, take intermediate shots that show the body in its immediate environment. An example of an intermediate photo would be showing a body in a trunk of a car, but not showing the entire vehicle.

The most detailed photographs are the closeup photos. These are usually things of evidentiary value like medications, weapons, trace evidence and injuries.

An investigation can be greatly aided through a systematic approach and proper documentation. Scene photographs allow others to see what the scene contained and further the understanding of those investigating.

## Iowa FACE Program Says “Thank You”

The Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner works closely with Iowa Department of Public Health staff in Des Moines and Injury Prevention Research Center (IPRC) personnel at the University of Iowa in investigating work-related deaths. Most of you have received a call for information regarding a worker's death from me, Murray Madsen, Trauma Investigator for the Iowa Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) program at the University. I do follow-up investigations on all suspected **work-related trauma deaths** in our state, and I asked for space in this newsletter to say "THANKS" for your help and to wish everyone "Happy Holidays."

This year's toll of Iowa worker deaths will be the fifth year in a row at or above the average of 79 per year since 1995. Obviously, your cooperation and assistance are important for early awareness and fact gathering and are very much appreciated by all of us who collaborate in IA FACE. Visit the IA FACE Web site at <http://www.public-health.uiowa.edu/FACE/index.html> for more information, and please remember to call IA FACE at 1-800-513-0998 or fax information to 319-335-4481 whenever you are called to a traumatic work death.

Murray Madsen  
Iowa FACE Program

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## Thank You

Jeffrey Call, Davis County Medical Examiner Investigator, sent us a suggestion for the generic business cards for families. He emailed the suggestion to have a card with our office information on the front and a place for the county to indicate their contact information on the back. These were a big hit at the IACME Fall Conference and we handed out almost 500 of them. If you are interested in receiving some of these cards, please let us know.

## Death Investigator Skill Labs Scheduled for 2009

By John Kraemer

The Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner (IOSME) would like to provide training opportunities to county medical examiners and investigators in hopes of increasing the number of certified medicolegal death investigators across the state. The IOSME will be hosting four death investigator skills labs. The dates of the labs are:

January 23, 2009

May 22, 2009

September 25, 2009

December 11, 2009

The goals of the skill labs are to help investigators complete the skills checklist required by the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI) in order to be eligible to sit for the Registry certification exam. Please remember, per Iowa Administrative Rules 127.7, county medical examiner investigators must attend a formal medicolegal death investigator training course **AND** obtain and maintain certification through the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators prior to or within three years of appointment.

Each of the above skill labs will occur at the State Medical Examiner's Conference Center in Ankeny, beginning at 8:00 am and ending at 5:00 pm. Topics covered in each of the labs will include: Overview of the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI) Registry Exam requirements and the ABMDI Skills Checklist; Drawing of specimens (blood, urine, and vitreous); Recognition of job-related stress; Ethical and legal issues and courtroom testimony; Collection and preservation of evidence; Basic death scene photography and body examination; Death scene investigation exercises (mock scenes); and an overview of mass fatality operations. Staff from the State Medical Examiner's Office, the Iowa Attorney General's Office and the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation Criminalistics Laboratory will be providing instruction.

One of the goals of the IOSME is to assist investigators in achieving Registry certification through the ABMDI. The IOSME will schedule and proctor the ABMDI certification exam on April 9, 2009 and again in November 2009, immediately after the Iowa Association of County Medical Examiner's Fall Conference. To sign up for one of our skill labs, please contact John Kraemer at (515) 725-1404.



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## Clerical Staff New Employees

By Cheryl Heinzman

We are happy to welcome new faces to our clerical staff.



Rachel Prueitt has worked part time as a morgue attendant since the summer of 2005. She then joined us part time in the office, as well as working as an autopsy tech. Rachel became full time effective November 14 and will work both in the office and as an autopsy tech.



Patti Pruismann joined the office staff effective December 1. She was formerly a secretary at the Bondurant-Farrar High School. Patti will do the billing for our office as well as other clerical duties.

Jane Christiansen is our part time records clerk. In addition, she helps us with transcription. Ann Allen has also joined our staff as a part-time transcriptionist.

Among our duties, the clerical staff is in charge of entering into the computer all information from the ME-1 forms sent to this office by the county medical examiners and investigators. It is important that we keep good records for county statistics and our annual report. Please remember to add a county case number to each case you send in, and we would also very much appreciate it if you would print your name in addition to signing your form so we can be sure to enter correct information. This will also help us in sending out reports on autopsies that are performed at our office, so that we can be sure the correct medical examiners and investigators receive copies of completed reports.

If you have any questions about assigning case numbers, please call the office at 515-725-1400. We would be happy to assist you in completing this important step in the process.

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## Administrative Staff New Employee

By Kathy Beauchamp



Dr. Jonathan Thompson began his duties as an Associate State Medical Examiner on December 12, 2008.

Dr. Thompson received his B.A. from the University of Iowa in Exercise Science. He received his M.D. from the University of Iowa School of Medicine. His four year residency training took place at the University of Minnesota Medical Center and his fellowship in forensic pathology was done at the Hennepin County Medical Examiner's office. Dr. Thompson is certified by the American Board of Pathology in Forensic Pathology and Anatomic and Clinical Pathology.

We are very happy that Dr. Thompson has joined our office. We are sure you will enjoy working with him.

## Educational Accomplishments

Congratulations are in order for four of our employees



Three of our medicolegal death investigators, Steve Tvrlik, Natalie Thomas and Brian Drewry obtained registry certification through the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI). They are now ABMDI Registered Diplomates. Please congratulate them next time you talk to them. We are very proud of their hard work to meet this goal. This is a great accomplishment and increases the professional and credibility standards our office strives towards.

There are now 18 Registered Diplomates in Iowa. We hope that this number will be growing as we send more people to the St. Louis course with the Coverdell grant money as mentioned on page 1. The office has now set up skill labs which are available to help meet the requirements to take this exam. We hope to have more people join our office staff with their own accomplishment of this certification.

Kathy Beauchamp, our Administrative Program Director, was presented by the State of Iowa and the Center for Professional Studies of Drake University the completion of the Iowa Certified Public Manager Program. Please congratulate her on her hard work over the past 18 months as she has now successfully completed this nationally accredited program.

## IOSME STATISTICS *Through November 30, 2008*

Cases Performed.....	691
Cremation Permits Signed .....	251
Death Certificates Signed.....	589
Homicides Autopsied.....	44