



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

Office of the State Forensic Examiner

Annual Activity Report January 1, 2007, to December 31, 2007

The authority and responsibilities of the Office of the State Forensic Examiner are provided in Chapter 11-19, Sections 11-19.1-18 through 11.19.1-20 of the North Dakota Century Code. The Office of the State Forensic Examiner accepts cases referred from county coroners or acting county coroners, performs postmortem examinations on the bodies, and signs Certificates of Death. It is the goal of the state forensic examiner to provide vital information needed by the county coroner, the family of the deceased, the North Dakota Department of Health, law enforcement, and many other agencies involved in the investigation of deaths.

Cases are referred to the forensic examiner when there are significant questions regarding cause and manner of death, if there is the potential for criminal charges, for assistance with ongoing investigations, and if there are other significant issues or questions that will remain unanswered if an autopsy is not done. The county coroner referring the case is responsible for transporting the case to the forensic examiner's morgue facility in Bismarck, N.D.

During this reporting period, 240 cases were referred to the state forensic examiner. Complete autopsies were done on 237 of these referrals. One referral was identified as being human remains of archaeological origin, and another was determined to be a nonhuman animal recovered from a house consumed by fire. An external examination without an autopsy was done on one individual. Toxicology studies consisting of blood alcohols and at least a basic drug screen are a routine component of the autopsy. The classification/manner and number of these referrals in 2007 are categorized as follows: **Natural Cause – 73; Accident – 79; Suicide – 65; Homicide – 14; Undetermined – 5.** Two referrals are pending investigation.

In addition to the referrals discussed above, the Office of the State Forensic Examiner provided consultations to county coroners on 77 cases. Anthropological evaluations of osseous material were provided on five occasions. Requests for solid organs, eyes and tissue were made by organ-procurement programs on 26 referrals. Solid organ procurement was authorized on six

individuals, and procurement of eyes and other tissue was authorized on the remaining 20 individuals. Referrals to the office continue to come from all regions of the state (e.g., northwest, southwest, northeast, southeast, and central).

The Office of the State Forensic Examiner is staffed by three full-time employees: the state forensic examiner, the administrator to the state forensic examiner, and an administrative assistant. Support personnel for the office include three part-time autopsy assistants.

The state forensic examiner is actively involved in death investigation training. The office routinely conducts educational seminars and provides lectures designed to improve death investigation to county coroners, law enforcement agencies, medical personnel, state and local government agencies, and other groups involved with death investigations. The state forensic examiner also participates in Child Fatality Review Committee activities and provides reports and guidelines in child death investigations to this committee.

In July 2007, Dr. William Massello III joined the North Dakota Department of Health as the state forensic examiner. Dr. Massello came to North Dakota from Roanoke, Va., where he had worked in the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner for the previous 27 years. Dr. Massello has a good understanding of death investigation in the rural community and looks forward to working with coroners, law enforcement personnel and others involved in death investigations in North Dakota.

Dr. Massello would like to encourage everyone to feel free to contact the Office of the State Forensic Examiner with any questions pertaining to North Dakota deaths or death investigation in general. Dr. Massello is very encouraged by staff and resources in North Dakota. We all hope to continue the practice of a strong, state-of-the art death investigation system in North Dakota.

**Referrals and Consultations to the State Forensic Examiner
January 1, 2007, to December 31, 2007**

Referrals consist of cases referred to the forensic examiner by county coroners for an examination or autopsy.

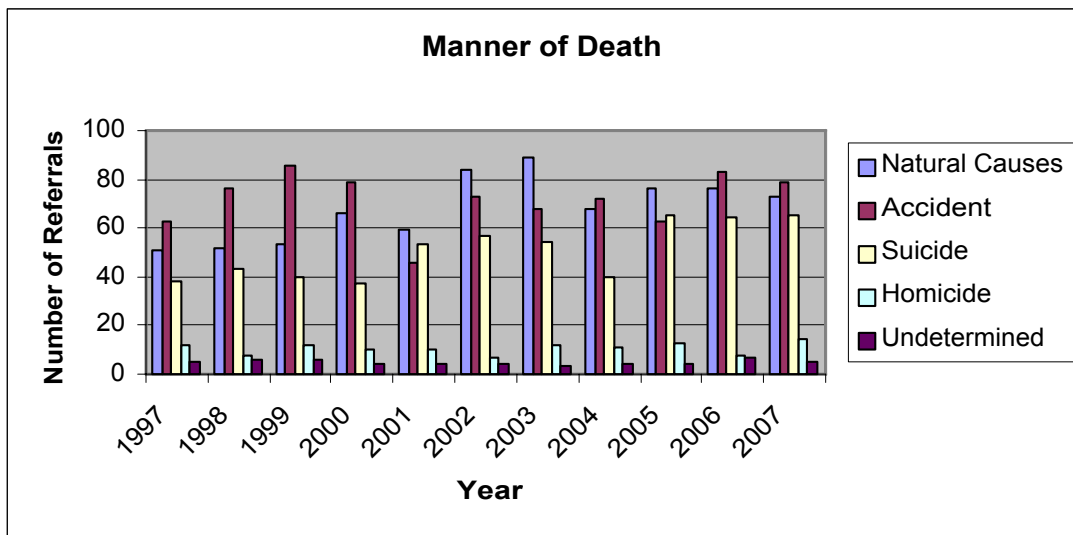
Consultations consist of discussing the circumstances surrounding a death with the county coroners and advising them about handling the case locally.

COUNTY	REFERRALS	CONSULTATIONS
Adams	0	1
Barnes	6	1
Benson	4	1
Billings	1	0
Bottineau	0	0
Bowman	1	2
Burke	4	0
Burleigh	45	15
Cass	43	19
Cavalier	2	2
Dickey	2	0
Divide	1	0
Dunn	1	0
Eddy	0	0
Emmons	0	0
Foster	1	1
Golden Valley	1	0
Grand Forks	2	0
Grant	1	2
Griggs	5	0
Hettinger	0	0
Kidder	1	0
LaMoure	0	3
Logan	1	0
McHenry	0	0
McIntosh	1	2
McKenzie	6	0
McLean	5	0
Mercer	8	2
Morton	13	0

COUNTY	REFERRALS	CONSULTATIONS
Mountrail	4	5
Nelson	4	2
Oliver	1	0
Pembina	7	0
Pierce	1	0
Ramsey	5	4
Ransom	1	0
Renville	0	0
Richland	1	2
Rolette	9	2
Sargent	1	1
Sheridan	0	0
Sioux	10	2
Slope	1	1
Stark	4	1
Steele	0	0
Stutsman	12	2
Towner	1	0
Traill	4	1
Walsh	5	1
Ward	9	1
Wells	3	1
Williams	2	0
Totals	240	77

Operating Expenses
January 1, 2007, to December 31, 2007

Morgue supplies and equipment	\$ 19,099.58
Laboratory and radiology services	\$ 16,492.50
Camera equipment, film, and film processing	\$ 1,079.79
Professional consultations:	
Toxicology	\$ 11,428.84
Odontology	\$ 1,889.15
Pathology	\$ 900.00
Mobile phone and paging	\$ 854.84
Travel – local	\$ 308.11
Professional memberships	\$ 400.00
Professional meetings	\$ 4,576.51
Office supplies and equipment	\$ 9,744.83
Contract services:	
Linen service	\$ 3,216.72
Infectious waste disposal	\$ 2,976.00
After-hours admissions	\$ 4,536.00
Janitorial services	\$ 4,250.00
Utilities	
Montana Dakota Utilities	\$ 21,148.70
City of Bismarck, Water Department	\$ 956.56
Building and grounds	\$ 11,432.90
Miscellaneous expenses	<u>\$ 6,904.63</u>
	\$122,195.66



	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Natural Causes	51	52	53	66	59	84	89	68	76	76	73
Accident	63	76	86	79	46	73	68	72	63	83	79
Suicide	38	43	40	37	53	57	54	40	65	64	65
Homicide	12	8	12	10	10	7	12	11	13	8	14
Undetermined	5	6	6	4	4	4	3	4	4	7	5
Total	169	185	197	196	172	225	226	195	221	238	236



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