



# Walworth County Medical Examiner's Office

Spring 2019

Volume 3, Number 1

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**SAVE THE DATE**  
**Motor Vehicle Death**  
**Investigation Training**  
**May 30, 2019**  
**8 a.m. - 1 p.m.**  
**HHS Auditorium**

### Walworth County Medical Examiner's Office

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Elkhorn, WI 53121  
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[www.co.walworth.wi.us](http://www.co.walworth.wi.us)

**Lynda Biedrzycki, MD**  
**Medical Examiner**

**Gina Carver**  
**Lead Investigator**

#### Deputy Medical Examiners

Gary Rowland, RN  
Karin Ross, RN  
Kimberly Rossi  
Lisa Loepke, RN  
Tammy Peterson, RN  
Alan Boyes  
Allison Driggett, RN

#### Associate Medical Examiners

Zelda Okia, MD  
Amy Sheil, MD

**To report a death,**  
**please call:**  
**(262) 741-4401**

## - Role of the Medical Examiner -

For those in Law Enforcement, if you have a death, you call for Car 99. If you are a funeral home called for a death, you are wondering if the Medical Examiner (ME) is involved. Are we signing the death certificate (DC) or performing an autopsy? What makes this an ME case? While it all starts with State Statute 979, here is a brief overview of what we do and why we are here.

Your everyday physicians and hospitals cannot sign a DC for any death that is **unnatural** (accident, suicide, homicide). If it appears as though a death is suspicious or unexpected, the Medical Examiner's Office (MEO) will likely be involved. This is why we are *not* involved in most hospice or nursing home deaths. In the majority of those cases, the death is expected; however, when one of those deaths has an associated injury, that death then becomes an ME case.

For home deaths, not under hospice, or scenes outside of a hospital or nursing home, the first thing your Deputy Medical Examiner (DME) will do is arrive on scene and pronounce the death. When rescue departs, unless MD1 was physically on scene, the time they have given was the time rescue stopped resuscitation. The time the DME gives once on scene is the actual time of death. This time is necessary for legal documents, such as the DC. Even if decomposition is evident, the person is not yet deceased until they have been pronounced.

What we are trained to do on scene does not vary much from case to case as we practice "Every Scene, Every Time." with a checklist of sorts:

- ✓ pronounce death; ✓ secure positive ID; ✓ locate next of kin (NOK); ✓ recent/medical/social history; ✓ determine signature required on the DC (the treating physician or the ME)

The answers we are given dictate what else needs to happen on scene. If the ME will sign the DC, we assess whether an autopsy or external investigation will be performed. The decedent may be released to the funeral home or transport is arranged to the MEO.

After Law Enforcement calls for Car 99, there are things the officers do which are time-savers. They get a tentative ID on the decedent, request information regarding NOK, note where they saw medications or drugs, and take their photos. This is all done before we arrive, allowing us to take our photos **before** evidence is moved. Many times they have also asked which funeral home the family wishes to use. Those that have worked with us often know that these things will always be done by the DME; having this information assists in the next steps performed.

How do we determine if an autopsy is necessary? Some autopsies are almost automatic: suicides, homicides, and motor vehicle collisions. Just because someone was alive just before a crash and deceased after, does not mean they died from those injuries. Documenting injuries is a large part of an autopsy. Additionally, the manner is not always a given; it could be natural, accidental, suicide or homicide. This is where someone's medical, social and recent histories are key, and your DME will ask those questions every time. Information gathered from the decedent's medications, as well as from their cell phone and/or computer can also generate much needed facts.

A thorough and efficient death investigation is always our goal! And we can't do it well without our partners – thank you everyone.

# MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE SPRING TRAINING – MOTOR VEHICLE DEATHS

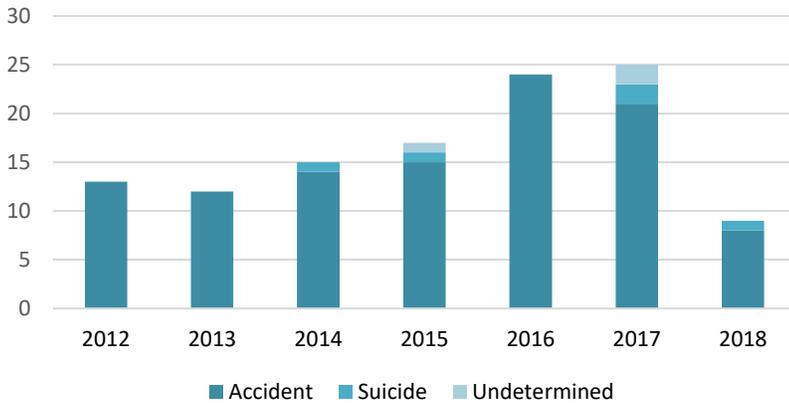
**SPEAKERS:** Medical Examiner's Office, Bureau of Transportation Safety, District Attorney's Office, Town of Linn PD, Walworth County Crash Investigation Unit, Flight for Life, Organ & Tissue

**TOPICS:** Best practices, scene safety, notifications, media concerns, criminal charges, search warrants, suicides, crash and burn, incident command, evidence

**DATE ● TIME ● LOCATION:** Thursday, May 30, 2019, 8 a.m. – 1 p.m. at Walworth County HHS Auditorium

**RSVP:** Lt. Todd Neumann (262) 741-4680

## Motor Vehicle Crashes



## 2012 – 2018 Drug-Related Deaths

	Total # drug-related deaths	By Substance (alone or in combination)			
		Total Fentanyl related	Total Heroin related (no fentanyl)	Opiate Medications (no fentanyl)	Other Drugs or Medications
<i>*cases still pending</i>					
2012	15	2	3	8	2
2013	18	1	7	8	2
2014	14	1	3	9	1
2015	23	1	6	11	5
2016	22	4	5	10	3
2017	17	5	2	6	4
2018*	21	10	0	6	5

Here's a hint:  
Case going for Autopsy?  
Secure the decedent's  
phone!



The phone can always be released after toxicology results are in – but we never know what surprises lie in the drug and alcohol testing. The majority of our autopsy cases have medications / illicit drugs / alcohol present on board at death



Meet Allison Driggett, DME

After college, I knew right away that I didn't want a traditional nursing role. I took a position as a recovery technician for the eye bank 16 years ago, working with donors and donor families before becoming the Medical Director in 2015. My interest in death investigation led me to Walworth County. I live in the Northeastern section of the County and enjoy running, gardening, boating and spending time with my husband & two wonderful young sons.