



National Association of Medical Examiners

Hic locus est ubi mors gaudet succurrere vitae

National Association of Medical Examiners

The National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) is the national professional organization of forensic pathologists, physician medical examiners, medical death investigators and death investigation system administrators who perform the official duties of the medico-legal investigation of deaths of public interest in the United States. NAME was founded in 1966 and currently has over 1000 members.

Organizational Achievements:

Work-force issues: NAME is concerned with the relatively static numbers of FP Fellows and Pathology residents / residencies. A creative approach to workforce issues involves 1) using J1 visa as “public health critical need”, allowing individuals training in FP to stay in this country with a path for citizenship following training. This utilizes the program largely used by PCP for health care needs in rural and frontier counties. NAME is promoting formal expansion of this for pathology and forensic trainees. 2) Some government and private practices are offering various loan reduction / loan forgiveness programs. 3) The NIH offered competitive grants for funding of expansion and/or establishment of forensic pathology fellowships. This was a successful program with at least six programs funded.

Efforts are underway nationally to formalize and expand these initiatives nationally. Separate federal funding for forensic fellowships is needed since few programs participate in traditional GME Medicare/Medicaid funding streams.

The opiate crisis continues, affecting all NAME offices and forensic pathologists. Some offices report over 50% increase in cases for each of the last 2 – 3 years and continued, unrelenting rises. Some offices are refusing deaths from other counties or triaging overdose deaths. Drug deaths now exceed motor vehicle deaths and in many offices, firearm deaths. The demands of a smaller workforce are staggering; too few pathologists and forensic pathologists are trained to handle routine medical-legal death investigation; this crisis is compounding the situation. Toxicology laboratories are stretched to provide basic services and are challenged with standards and protocols for the ever-evolving synthetic opiates coming in large quantities from abroad.

The proposed federal legislation last year to create an “Office of Forensic Pathology / Forensic Medicine / Medicolegal Death Investigation” within the CDC to balance the proposed “Office of Forensic Science” within the US Justice Department continues on a “back burner” in Washington. It is NAME’s strong position that medical examiners should NOT be a part of the criminal justice / law enforcement branches of government but should be represented at a public health level. Both proposed office structures would have strong medical examiner independence language.

Education and Research issues:

1. Received funding from SUDC Foundation for a study, along with the American Association of Pediatrics, for a study of sudden death in infants and children. There are unmet needs of parents and communities as well as disparities in classification and certification of these deaths. This study is structured along lines of the highly successful opiate death investigation manuscript three years ago. Over 35 professionals from NAME, AAP, and others are involved.
2. NAME continues active CME, CE and SAMs programs for its members. CME, CE and SAMS were offered at the NAME Annual meeting in Scottsdale, AZ and recently in Seattle, WA at the AAFS meeting and NAME Interim meeting. Partnering with ASCP, the “RISE” examination for forensic pathology fellows continues strong performance for current FP fellows.

3. Building on the success of the opiate drug death investigation paper three years ago, NAME and several organizations (Neurology, Cardiac) interested in sudden death in epileptics and sudden death in adults, are reviewing protocols and investigation of these types of death.
4. Working with the APC, PRODS and ABP for autopsy requirements during residency training. The joint task force of APC, PRODS, representative Autopsy Directors at University residency path programs and NAME have a working document for this issue.
5. A new position paper for deaths in custody was approved by the membership.
6. Existing position papers for "Organ and Tissue Transplantation" and "Independence of the Medical Examiner / Coroner" will be reviewed and revised. Position papers of NAME are drafted by a group of experts within NAME, presented to membership for review and comment, revised as needed, approved by the BOD, who may request a further revision and open comment period of members, then finally approved by the Executive Committee and Full Board of Directors.

NAME Foundation is active and financially healthy. NAME Foundation serves to promote public charitable, educational, and scientific advancement of NAME and Medicolegal death investigation. In 2017, awards were made for "Best Papers" for members, residents, medical students, affiliates and affiliates in training at the NAME Annual meeting. We also awarded a public health impact award for the best application of forensic pathology and public health. That was awarded to Rebecca Wilcoxson, MD, a forensic pathologist at the Hennepin County Medical Examiner's Office for her work on synthetic fentanyl overdoses.

NAME continues to grow and thrive in its mission of promoting excellence in medical legal death investigation and to promote and enhance the role of medical examiners in society. We are a small professional society, with just over 1000 members; in January of this year we added our second staff member. Our contributions to improvement of death investigations, forensic pathology and collaborations with scientists and researchers in several areas of sudden death, trauma and mental health programs are significant, sustained and growing.

Respectfully submitted,



Mary Ann Sens, M.D., Ph.D.

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