Workshop # 3: Best Practices for Investigation of Overdose Deaths

**Date**  Monday, October 14, 2019

**Time**  8:00 am-12:00 pm

**Cost**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Member Rates</th>
<th>Non-member Rates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Bird Registration</td>
<td>May 1- Aug 22</td>
<td>$125</td>
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<tr>
<td>Late Registration</td>
<td>Aug 23-Sept 29</td>
<td>$150</td>
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<tr>
<td>On-site Registration</td>
<td>Sept 30-Oct 15</td>
<td>$175</td>
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**Chairs**
Lorraine D. Edwards  
Advanced Chemist  
Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene  
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Ruth Winecker  
Director, National Laboratory Certification Program  
RTI, International  
rewinecker@rti.org

**Abstract**
The number of overdose deaths attributed to opioids and other drugs continues unabated in the United States, straining both financial and personnel resources in Coroner and Medical Examiner Offices. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that over 70,000 overdose deaths occurred in the United States in 2017, with approximately 68% related to opioids. Rates of deaths attributed to overdoses are likely underestimated due to inadequate training, resources and inconsistencies in the death investigation system. For example, coroners in some states may be elected officials with little to no experience in the medical field or death investigation process. Autopsies and toxicological testing are not always performed and requirements for training vary from county to county and state to state. The number of certified forensic pathologists in the United States is limited, thus autopsy services are often shared by multiple jurisdictions. The Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC) medicolegal investigation subcommittee has recognized the variability and inconsistencies that exist in an overdose death investigation. The importance of the medicolegal death investigation community in providing accurate and timely, evidence based information cannot be underestimated to improve the quality of death surveillance data.

This workshop will focus on Best Practices for postmortem investigation of suspected overdoses, with special emphasis on opioids. Guidelines and recommendations will emphasize those proposed by the National Association of Medical Examiners and the CDC for improving content and quality of death certification data in a multidisciplinary manner and improving accuracy of public health and safety monitoring of the opioid/drug overdose epidemic. Students in this workshop will receive training from
leading experts on forensic pathology, medicolegal death scene investigation, and toxicological analyses and interpretation. Determining and documenting causality on Death Certificates, in additional to challenging case examples will be included.

**Learning Objectives**

1. Attendees of this workshop will be able to cite best practices for the investigation of a suspected overdose including scene investigation, autopsy, preferred forensic specimens, and recommended scope of toxicological analyses
2. Attendees of this workshop will appreciate that interpretation of toxicological analytical results obtained in a suspected overdose case must be evaluated in context of autopsy findings, and patient history
3. Attendees of this workshop will be able to compare and contrast the various levels of practice (best and minimum) in investigation and certification of overdose deaths and cite current gaps and opportunities for improvement in the area of medico-legal death investigation

**Faculty**

Lorrine D. Edwards  
Advanced Chemist  
Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene

Gregory Davis  
Professor of Pathology, Director of Forensic Division  
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Patricia Fore  
Medical Examiner and Death Investigator Trainer  
North Carolina Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

Robert Johnson  
Chief Toxicologist  
Tarrant County Office of the Medical Examiner

**Audience Knowledge Level**

Basic - suitable for individuals new to the field, requires little prior knowledge to the subject matter
Intermediate - Involves more advanced concepts requiring some technical working knowledge or prior exposure to the subject matter

**Workshop Agenda**

8:00-8:20 am: Introduction-History of Standard Setting in Medico-Legal Death Investigations  
Lorrine (Lori) Edwards

8:20-9:10 am: The NAME position paper on Recommendations for the Investigation, Diagnosis, and Certification of Deaths Related to Opioid Drugs- Lessons Learned from Leading a Panel of Experts to Write and Update the NAME position paper.  
Dr. Gregory Davis

9:10-10:00 am: Lessons Learned from a Medical Examiner-Death Investigation Training Program  
Patricia Fore

10:00-10:30 am: Morning Break

10:30-11:20 am: Setting a Minimum Standard of Practice for Testing in Postmortem Forensic Toxicology Laboratories -Gap analysis current, minimum and best practices
Dr. Robert Johnson
11:20-11:45 am: Turning Horror Stories into Best Practices
   Dr. Ruth Winecker
11:45 am-12:00 pm: Panel Discussion