

Forensic Pathology

- Major Issues-
- Commission Products and Impact-
- Priorities-

Presented on behalf of the
National Association of Medical Examiners



NCFS Meeting
April 11, 2017
Washington, DC

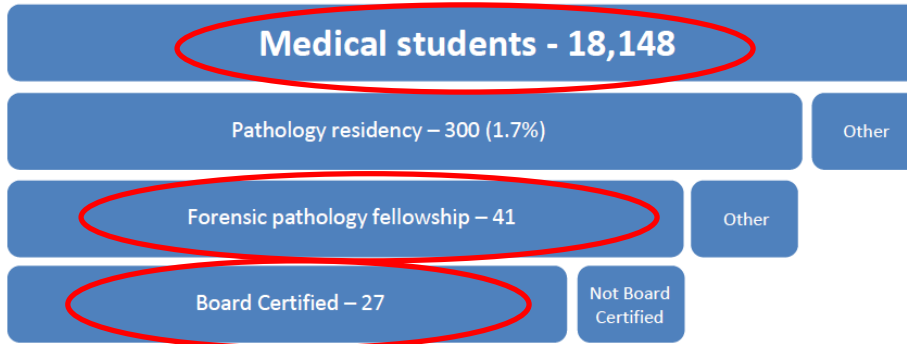
Randy Hanzlick, MD

Issues in a Nutshell

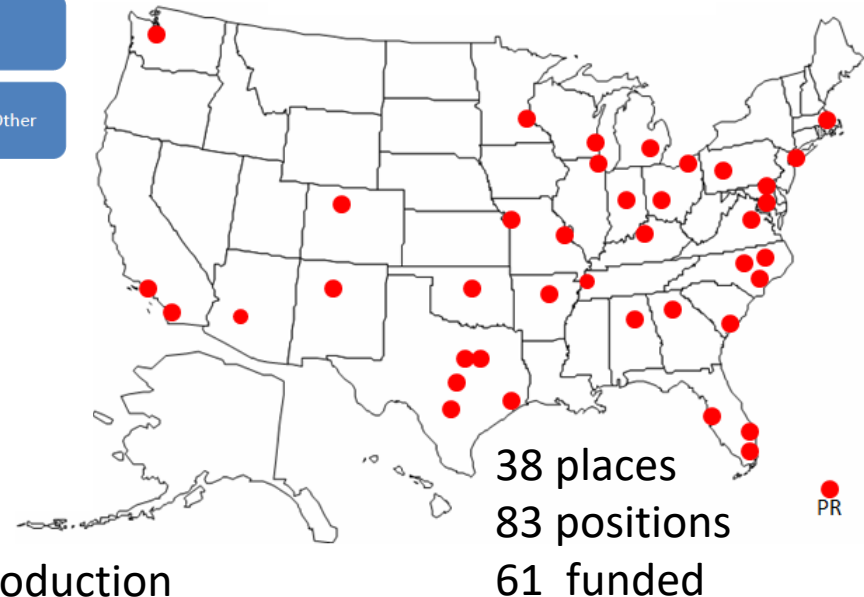
- FP recruitment, retention, and manpower need
- Outdated facilities, lacking equipment & services
- Antiquated death investigation systems
- Increasing case loads
- High debt and non-competitive salaries
- Infringement on autonomy and practice
- Standards compliance is challenging
- No comprehensive organized federal assistance

Forensic Pathologist Manpower

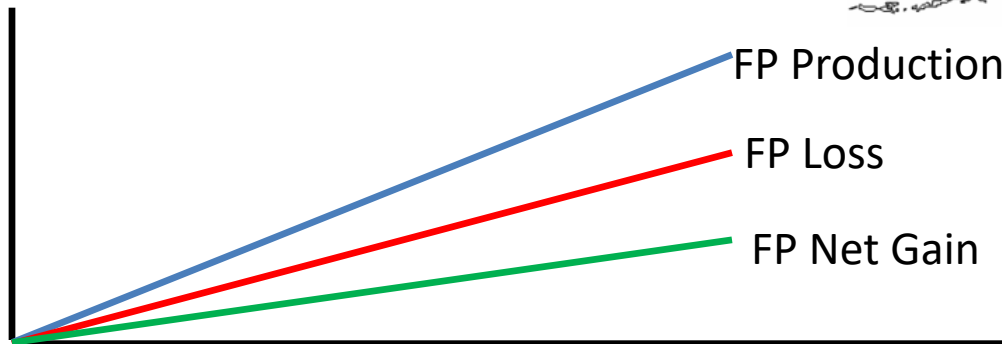
Annual Forensic Pathologist Pipeline Data



Training Locations



Cumulative Growth in FP Manpower



Not enough FPs, places to train, or new FP trainees

MDI Facilities in Need

SWGMDI

Infrastructure Committee

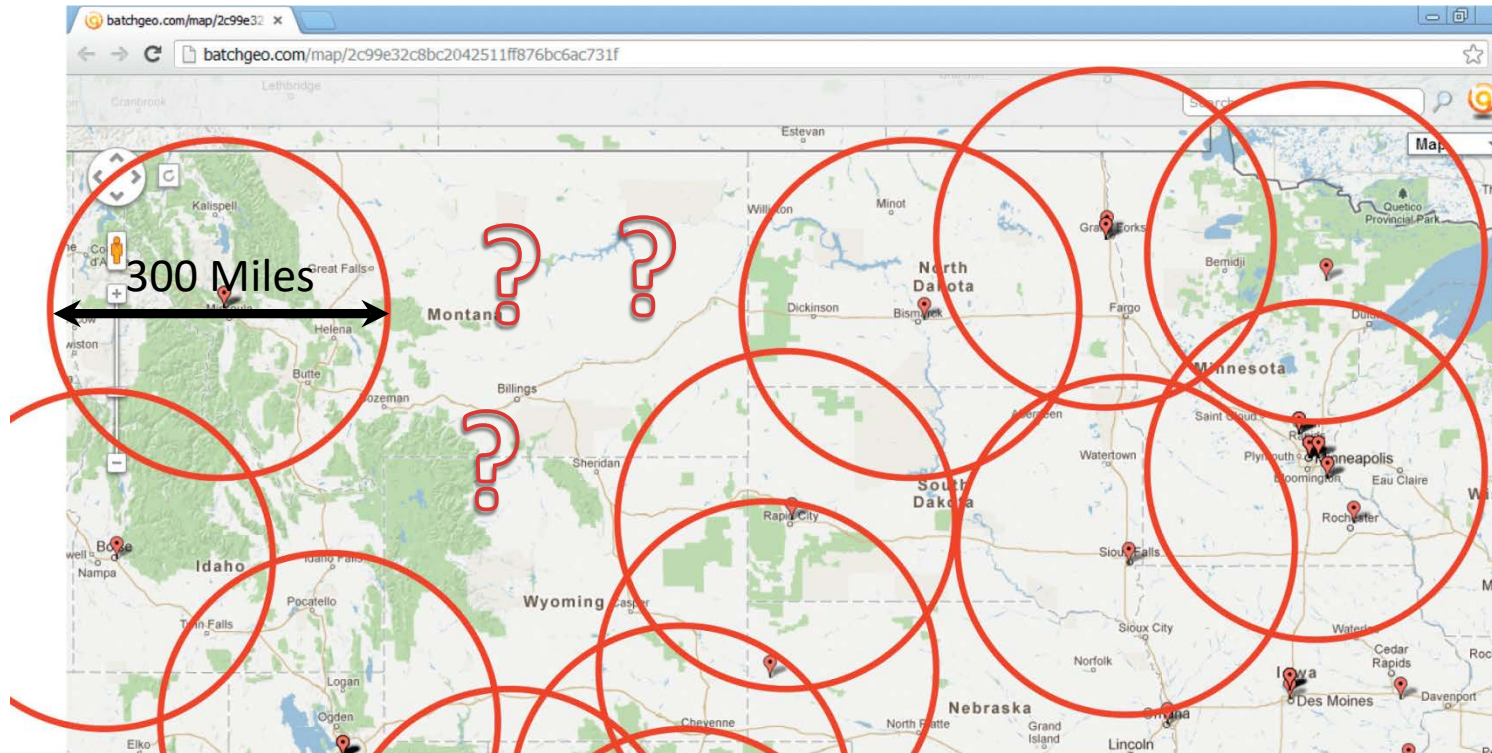
Report 3

Medicolegal Autopsy Facilities
in the United States
May 26, 2011

Survey Results:

- 44% = hospital or other non-MDI facility
- Only 1/3 rated “adequate “ or better
- 65% had no plans for updated or new facility

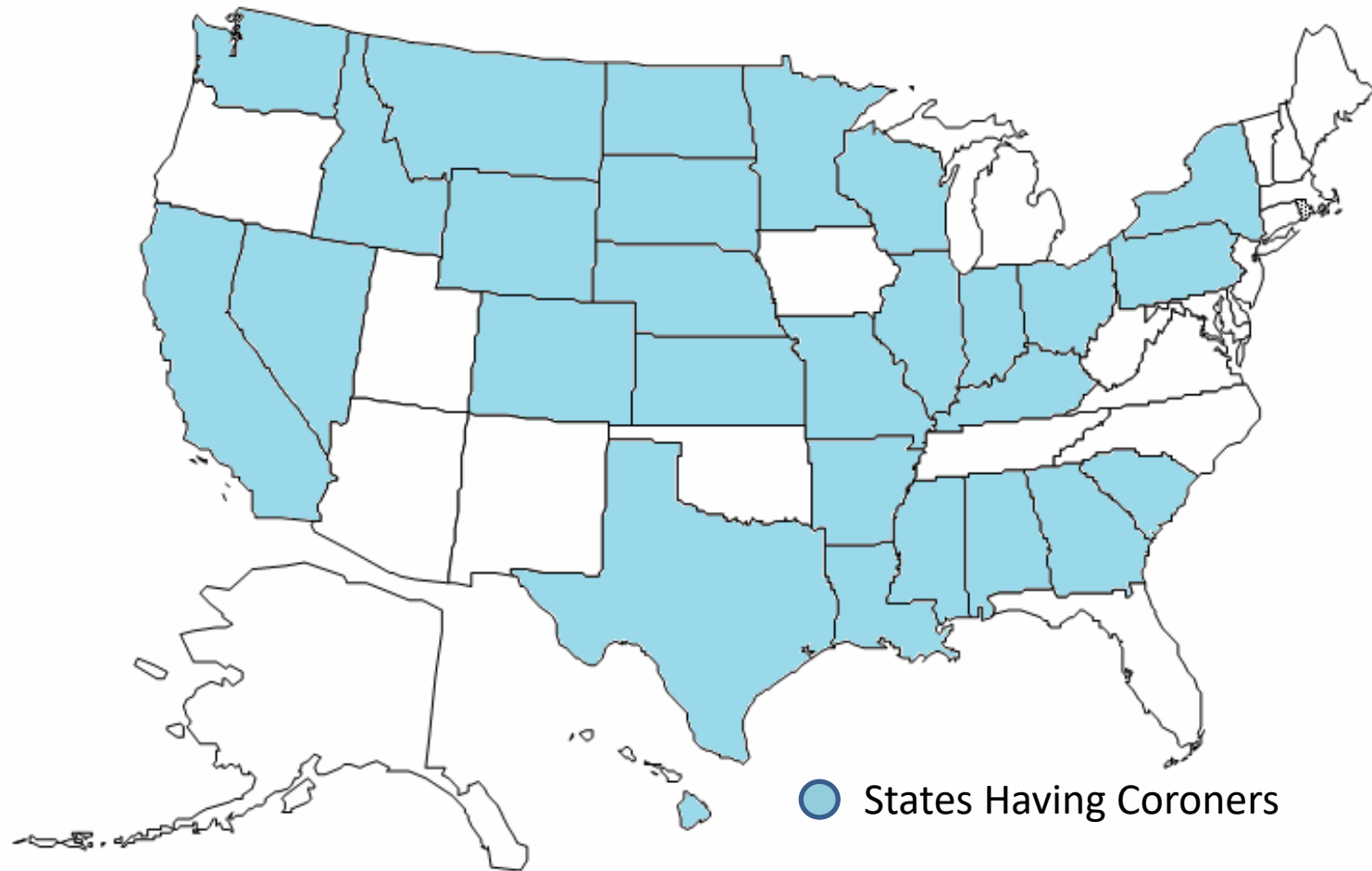
No Nearby Services or Facilities



○ = Areas within 150 miles of an autopsy center

? = No nearby facilities or services

28 States Still Have Coroners



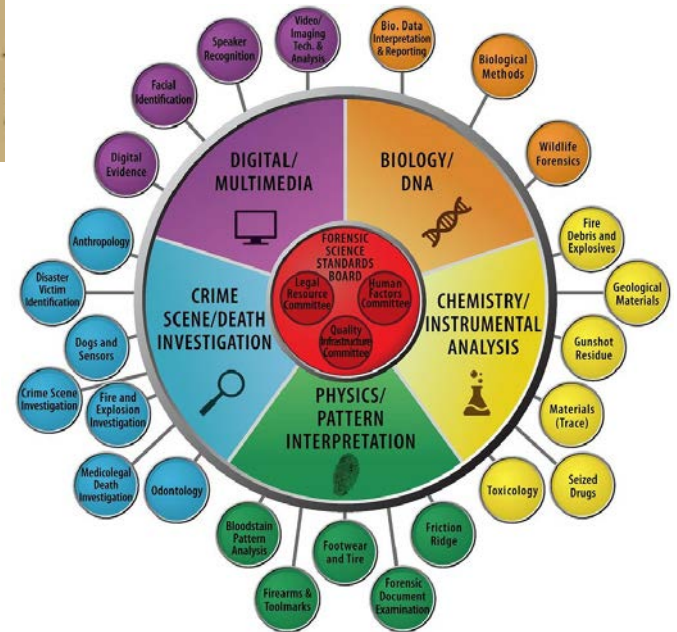
Coroner Requirements and their Selection need to be addressed.

Administrative Reporting

- Governing body or Government Executive
- Health Department
- Attorney General, State's Attorney, Justice Dept.
- Sheriff/Public Safety
- State Investigative Agency
- Prosecutor
- Academic Center/University
- Many Others

Administrative Setting Can Impact on Funding and Priorities

Standards and Accreditation



A Recent “Flurry” of Standards Organizations and Issues

Certification



Important to Routine, Daily Death Investigation Practice



Relevant, but Less Important to Daily Routine MDI Practice

Concern About Proposed New Paradigm



- Cognitive Bias?
- Task Relevance?
- Sequential Unmasking?

Forensic Pathologists must have timely access to information about:
Scene, Circumstances, Investigation, Medical/Social History

Court Procedures and Conduct



- Court procedures seem quite variable
- Court and attorney practices may need more attention than Forensic Pathology practice
- Education of courts and attorneys is needed regarding forensic pathology and its use in court

Mass Fatalities



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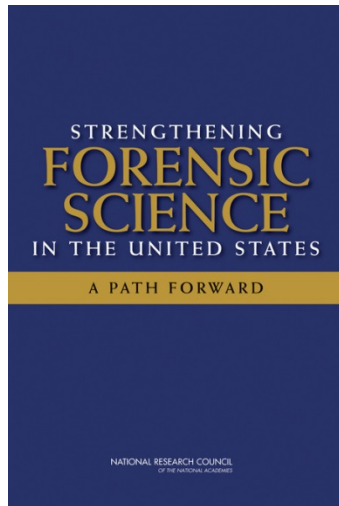
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Recommendation to the Attorney General National Disaster Call Center



A Call Center would be useful, but is less urgent than other needs.

Death Investigation Laws



Recommendation 11:

To improve medicolegal death investigation:

- (a) Congress should authorize and appropriate incentive funds to the National Institute of Forensic Science (NIFS) for allocation to states and jurisdictions to establish medical examiner systems, with the goal of replacing and eventually eliminating existing coroner systems



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**Recommendation to the Attorney General
Model Legislation for
Medicolegal Death Investigation Systems**

- State Death Investigation Laws need to be Modernized/ Improved.
- Systems of all types need improvement.
- Coroner qualifications and selection need special attention.

NCFS Product Impact To-Date



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Certification of Medicolegal Death Investigators



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Recommendation to the Attorney General
Model Legislation for
Medicolegal Death Investigation Systems



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Electronic Networking of Medical Examiner and
Coroner Offices in the United States



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Recommendation to the Attorney General
National Disaster Call Center



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Recommendation to the Attorney General
Formation of a National Office for Medicolegal Death Investigation



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Views of the Commission
Communication with Next of Kin and Other Family
Members



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Views of the Commission
Recognizing the Autonomy and
Neutrality of Forensic Pathologists

Accreditation



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Accreditation of Medicolegal
Death Investigation Offices

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Increasing the Number, Retention, and Quality of
Board-Certified Forensic Pathologists

Need = \$35M/year for both

Total Allocated So Far = \$4M

National MDI Office



Should assist systems in states with funding and resources, not run or regulate the systems.

Forensic Practitioner Types



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Defining Forensic Science and Related Terms

- **FORENSIC SCIENCE PRACTITIONER**—An individual who (1) applies scientific or technical practices to the recognition, collection, analysis, or interpretation of evidence for criminal and civil law or regulatory issues, and (2) issues test results, provides reports, or provides interpretations, conclusions, or opinions through testimony with respect to such evidence.

These Distinctions are Appropriate and Good

→ **FORENSIC MEDICINE AGENCY**—An organization in the public or private sector that employs forensic medicine practitioners and issues reports prepared by forensic medicine practitioners.

- **FORENSIC MEDICINE PRACTITIONER**—A physician, physician extender, or other health care provider who applies medical knowledge and practices to the investigation of the medicolegal aspects of death, injury, neglect, or behavior.

Top Priorities

- Forensic Pathologist recruitment, retention, compensation, and distribution
- Regional facilities, upgrade facilities, improve equipment , services, and communication
- Modernize laws and improve all systems
- Ensure autonomy and independence
- Improve court procedures and interactions
- Keep Standards and Accreditation reasonable
- In Short: Tangible follow up on existing Commission Views and Recommendations

Research

Summary of Suggested Research Focus Areas: NAME Survey #22
October 5, 2009



SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP FOR
MEDICOLEGAL DEATH INVESTIGATION

Research in Forensic Pathology/Medicolegal Death Investigation

A Report and Recommendations Prepared by the Research Committee of the
Scientific Working Group on Medicolegal Death Investigation (SWGMDI)



OSAC Research Needs Assessment Form

Title of research need: Assessing the utility of autopsy in contentious medicolegal categories of death

Keywords: Autopsy, utility, medicolegal, external examination, inspection

Submitting subcommittee(s): MDI Date Approved: 1/28/16

(If SAC review identifies additional subcommittees, add them to the box above.)

- **Research need** has been identified
- **What is needed** is manpower and money to do it

