

CENTRAL OFFICE  
921 NE 23<sup>rd</sup> Street  
Oklahoma City, OK 73105  
Tel: (405) 239-7141  
Fax: (405) 239-2430



EASTERN OFFICE  
1115 West 17<sup>th</sup> St.  
Tulsa, OK 74107  
Tel: (918) 295-3400  
Fax: (918) 585-1549

**OFFICE OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER**  
**BOARD OF MEDICOLEGAL INVESTIGATIONS**  
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**REGULAR MEETING**

Board Meeting Minutes from  
Thursday August 3, 2023, at 2:00 p.m.  
921 N.E. 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, Oklahoma City, OK 73105 and  
Via videoconference at 1627 Southwest Blvd., Tulsa, OK 74117

*In conformity with the Oklahoma Open Meeting Act, advance notice of this meeting was transmitted to the Oklahoma Secretary of State on November 9, 2022, at 4:26 P.M. and public notice of this meeting, together with the agenda, was posted in prominent public view on the front door of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, 921 NE 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, Oklahoma City, OK and 1627 Southwest Blvd., Tulsa, OK 74117.*

Members present: Mr. Keith Reed, Mr. Tyler Stiles, Ms. Andrea Fielding, Ms. Angela Marsee, Dr. Doug Stewart, and Dr. Eric Pfeifer.

Members absent: Dr. Jason Beaman, Dr. Eric Harp, Dr. Michael Magguilli.

Others Present: Dr. Josh Lanter (OCME), Madalynn Martin (OAG), Kari Learned (OCME), Elysa Powers (OCME).

Mr. Stiles called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. Roll was called and a quorum was established.

Ms. Fielding motioned to adopt the minutes as written from the May 18, 2023, meeting. Mr. Reed seconded the motion. Roll was called, Ms. Marsee and Dr. Steward abstained, all others were in favor.

● Update from the Chief Medical Examiner, Dr. Eric Pfeifer

~ Dr. Pfeifer presented the agency update to the Board.

Dr. Pfeifer announced the top concerns have grown some. The supply of interested FP has dwindled and getting forensic pathologists (FP) and support staffs continues to be a challenge. We've had some international interest; however, they do not meet requirements to practice in Oklahoma. The best practice going forward will be to train fellows and retain the good ones. We have 1 fellow this year and 2 next year that we think are good candidates to retain. If we go this route, the process could take 2-3 years to fill the open positions.

We are working with the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) and other agencies to make the death certification process more efficient. Internally, we are looking at options on how the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) could assist in speeding up the process of completing death certificates.

The OCME toxicology lab is under significant stress as they prepare for the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) accreditation site visit scheduled for the end of this month. They've had continual accreditation by the American Board of Forensic Toxicology (ABFT), however, ISO is the newest standard. Once the site visit is over, 2 forensic toxicologists will refocus on signing out their reports.

We've started working on strategic planning for next year. We are asking for another forensic anthropologist, forensic pathologist, and possible support staffs. We will need to add office space for these positions and are discussing building office space on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor at the Oklahoma City practice.

The agency received funding this year for 4 new investigators, however, we are having trouble with Office of Management and Enterprise Services (OMES) fleet department getting vehicles for the new positions. This has been an ongoing issue and previous requests for exemptions have been denied. Ms. Fielding said the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigations (OSBI) experienced the same issues and were approved for an exemption.

Fentanyl deaths in Oklahoma in the last 5 calendar years have increased 1010%. This trend does not appear to be slowing. This is an additional burden on our toxicology laboratory and physicians.

#### Physicians –

Our fellow from last year, Dr. Doane joined our Tulsa practice as a staff physician. We are recruiting 4 pathologists for Tulsa and Oklahoma City. Outside the 2 pathologist joining us in July 2024, we have had no interest. We are working on improving recruitment in the fellowship program and relying on training our own forensic pathologists. We have opened the practice to contract and locums work. Dr. Niblo previously worked in the Tulsa office and is currently doing locums work in Oklahoma City and Tulsa. She is scheduled to work Saturday, Sunday, and Monday. This helps tremendously and the addition of Dr. Niblo has seen an immediate improvement in morale.

Last week Dr. Pfeifer attended the New England Seminar in Forensic Sciences. He listened to people from New York, Delaware, New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Maine who discussed difficulties they are facing. The response to their struggles is to cut corners on National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) autopsy performance standards to get the work done. This seems counter-intuitive to Dr. Pfeifer who said we should aspire to achieve the standards. It became apparent to Dr. Pfeifer that we are doing well in this area.

#### Case turn-around time –

Open autopsy cases over 90 days old are down to 368. The data suggests we are signing out cases quicker than we get them in.

#### Fellowship –

Dr. Abreo joined the fellowship program for this academic year as a fellow. She is off to a good start. Her reports look great and she's actively participating in the practice.

Next year our program matched for both available fellowship slots. This is notable since several esteemed programs in the country went un-matched. With approximately 80 fellowship slots available this year, nation-wide only half were filled due to the lack of interest in forensic pathology.

The agency applied for a grant to enhance the fellowship program. This could potentially include expanded compensation and possibly student loan relief. We should know the awarding results in September.

#### Administration –

The agency is still in the bidding/procurement phase of a new case management system (CMS). Dr. Pfeifer's main concern is the time it's taken to get approvals through OMES. We are running the risk of not meeting the milestones before the grant funding expires. The agency will set aside money on the possibility we need to pay for a portion of the CMS.

An administrative assistant was hired in part to help our Family Assistance Coordinator in Oklahoma City. This reflects the 25% caseload increase in the last few years. We are also considering a project manager for building maintenance, NAME record keeping, and fleet management.

#### Anthropology –

Oklahoma is full of shallow, clandestine graves. Our 3 full-time anthropologists are overloaded with case work. Due to this we are asking of a 4<sup>th</sup> in the budget request.

#### Autopsy services –

The autopsy labs in Oklahoma City and Tulsa have semi-precious terrazzo floors. Oklahoma City's floor is now 6 years old and needs some maintenance. The Oklahoma City practice has 20,000 sq. ft. which will run approximately \$3.00 per square foot. We are in the process of requesting bids for this service.

We have engaged in a research study to assess the use of the CT along with bedside Randox toxicology testing. This is to see if we can replace some full autopsies in younger decedents who don't have a natural disease but have a positive toxicology. So far, the results suggest this could be done. We will continue the study for another year or so. Dr. Pfeifer says at this point, the study looks very promising. Additionally, we routinely CT and Lodox (x-ray) every decedent. This reduces the waiting time for the pathologists since this process is done when the body is received.

#### Information technology (IT) –

The installment process of the Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) has entered its 8<sup>th</sup> year. We are looking into the IT cost of the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor buildout. We were quoted approximately \$100K for the project.

#### Investigations –

The average scene response time has been reduced from 1 hour, 25 minutes reported at the last meeting to 1 hour and 13 minutes. Dr. Pfeifer would like to see this response time even shorter.

Permit turnaround time has also decreased. October 2021, the average was 16 hours 13 minutes. We're now averaging 11 hours, 12 minutes. The goal is 2 business days which we are well within.

Toxicology lab –

The current turnaround time for positive toxicology results is 76 days. We are currently meeting NAME guidelines of 90% completed within 90 days. However, we would like to cut the turnaround time to 90% completed within 60 days.

The toxicology laboratory needs additional space for personnel. The expansion to the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor will also help in this area.

Legislation –

Dr. Pfeifer is not aware of any legislation or interim studies that may affect the agency.

Priority project –

The priority project for the agency has not changed and will continue to be National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) reaccreditation by the end of 2025. This will be contingent on recruiting the needed physicians. Presently under NAME guidelines, they permit 250 full autopsy equivalents per physician per year.

Financial update –

Dr. Pfeifer discussed ideas for use of funds that have not been used from salaries that were encumbered for physician and other positions but were not used. A carryover adjustment was submitted for \$2.3M which was added to our available funds. We presently have \$7M in unincumbered cash. Dr. Pfeifer proposed the money be used in the following manner. Reserve \$3M for 2 months payroll expenses. The agency has several diagnostic machines that cost over \$500K each. We would like to reserve \$1M to immediately replace them as they reach the end of life and begin to fail. Dr. Pfeifer would like to allocate \$2M to the toxicology lab and Oklahoma City office expansion. The office expansion will be relatively inexpensive, however, the air handling portion in the toxicology lab will be a major expense. We will know more in the upcoming weeks as we have additional discussions with all parties. Lastly, Dr. Pfeifer would like to reserve \$1M for the CMS on the chance the project isn't completed within the required timeframe.

Mr. Reed asked if the CMS delay is solely with OMES, and Dr. Pfeifer confirmed that to be true. Ms. Fielding asked if OCME relies completely on OMES for IT needs. Dr. Pfeifer said OMES provides all IT services to the agency with the exception of an onsite Technical Relationship Manager. He is an OMES employee, however, OCME pays his salary. He is imbedded within our agency and is a valuable asset who we rely on greatly.

Dr. Pfeifer added that once the CMS vendor is selected, we will have a short amount of time to meet the milestones of the project. The grant funds expire July 31, 2024. Any milestones met after that date will be paid by OCME.

● Update from the Deputy Chief Medical Examiner, Dr. Josh Lanter

Dr. Lanter announced to the Board that the new Tulsa office is 99% complete on all necessary items. They are primarily waiting on security features they identified as weak points. The vendor is schedule to repair those issues in the near future. There are no issues with the building. The relationship with

Oklahoma State University (OSU) has eliminated any delays or major problems. Some HVAC issues were identified and corrected within hours, at this point Dr. Lanter has no complaints.

The Tulsa office will need to adjust for future growth. As mentioned in a previous meeting, the Tulsa practice is already running out of office space. They are working on ideas of how to increase that and think they may be alright for another year or two before needing to press OSU for additional offices. Dr. Lanter feels they have a good relationship with OSU and think they will allow the Tulsa practice to expand. The autopsy suite and coolers have plenty of room, the need is essentially office space.

New Business –  
No new business.

Mr. Reed motioned to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Marsee seconded the motion. Roll was called and were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 2:27 pm.