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OFFICE OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER
BOARD OF MEDICOLEGAL INVESTIGATIONS
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SPECIAL MEETING

Board Meeting Minutes from
Thursday May 18, 2023, at 2:00 p.m.
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 May 9, 2023, at 3:31 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 23rd Street, Oklahoma City, OK and 1627 Southwest Blvd., Tulsa, OK 74117.

Members present: Dr. Eric Harp, Dr. Jason Beaman, Mr. Keith Reed, Mr. Tyler Stiles, Ms. Aungela Spurlock, Dr. Michael Magguilli, and Dr. Eric Pfeifer.

Members absent: Ms. Angela Marsee, Dr. Doug Stewart

Others Present: Dr. Josh Lanter (OCME), Arden Nerius (OAG), Brad Green (OSBI), Kari Learned (OCME), Samantha Richardson (OCME), Jodi Dillon (OCME), Michele Krizan (OCME), Lori Shively (OCME), Curtis Woody (FOX23), and John Asebes (FOX23).

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

Mr. Stiles motioned to adopt the minutes as written from February 2, 2023, meeting. Ms. Spurlock seconded the motion. Roll was called, Dr. Beaman abstained, all others were in favor.

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

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

Although the COVID pandemic is waning, the agency caseload is remains elevated. Dr. Pfeifer announced this is an area of top concern for the agency. All manners of death are on the rise, we are specifically seeing an increase in overdose deaths. Fentanyl deaths have increased 1000% over previous years. The 2022 data is on track to exceed 600 Fentanyl related deaths. The addition of these deaths and the continued increase from the COVID era leaves us short on manpower to work these cases.

Dr. Pfeifer is optimistic the agency will receive the \$1.3M increase in funding that was requested. This will allow for the addition of 4 investigators and a couple other positions. We have been approved for a new case management system (CMS). The one currently being used is 23 years old. It is an antiquated

system that doesn't integrate with other applications. The new CMS is estimated to cost \$1.5M, if not more.

The Oklahoma City office is already bursting at the seams and have outgrown the current space. The 3rd floor of the Oklahoma City building is currently an empty shell and is available for expansion. The grant proposal to expand was not approved. However, the agency may have money to complete a buildout.

In the past, it was the agency's opinion was that it was more efficient and cost effective to employ fulltime physicians. However, the agency has changed its view on contract and locum work. We are working to identify candidates who are willing to work with us on a contract basis. They would assist with overdose and apparent natural deaths. They would not be assigned homicide or pediatric cases. The funding for this work is currently within the budgetary means for the agency.

Case turn-around time –

Open autopsy cases over 90 days old have slightly increased from 369 to 438. Until additional physicians are hired, we will continue to see a higher level of open cases. We are actively recruiting for 4 more physicians and are opening the practice to contract and locum work.

Fellowship –

The fellowship program is very strong. One new fellow will start the beginning of July. She is currently a University of Oklahoma pathology resident. Two positions for the following academic year (2024-2025) have already been filled. The program received official notification of continued accreditation status by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME).

The first national match day for forensic pathology was May 3rd. Through the match, the agency interviews interested candidates; the candidate ranks the program, and the program ranks the candidate. The match uses a computerized algorithm to place candidates into the most preferred fellowship program. In the past this was accomplished through interviews and deciding internally which candidate was the best choice, then offer them the fellowship position. The match will be a more efficient way of selecting fellows in the future.

The agency applied for a fellowship grant to expand the program. We would like to make our program supra competitive by assisting the fellowship candidates with recruitment and interview expenses, fellowship salary enhancement and compensation, including loan repayment assistance, professional membership fees, conference travel costs, and away rotations for specialty training. The funding would also be used to develop an external outreach program encouraging students to pursue FP and medicolegal careers.

Unfortunately, one of the fellows in the program this year will not be graduating. They encountered several interruptions in the practice year of the fellowship which have interfered with this person's ability to finish the program. We petitioned the ACGME for additional time to train this person to make up for the time they lost, however, we were denied.

Administration –

A lot of time has been focused on the procurement of the new CMS.

Anthropology –

The agency now has 3 full time anthropologists and are in need of a fourth. This will be a consideration for the budget request next fiscal year. Dr. Sara Getz was just named to the Board of Directors for the American Board of Forensic Anthropology.

Autopsy services –

Recently we were honored to have Irina Flige, Nobel Prize winning Russian activist and recipient of the Clyde Snow Social Justice Award tour our Oklahoma City practice. She speaks out on human rights and mistreatment of the Russian people. She was very interested in our anthropology lab and spent a long time asking questions.

The German government also visited the agency. If tissues transplanted in German citizens are derived from the United States, they are required to make site visits to look at the facilities where decedents are stored. Specifically, they are looking at how well the refrigeration is maintained, chain of custody, cleanliness, etc.

Information technology (IT) –

We are in the procurement phase of the new CMS.

We continue working toward the toxicology laboratory LIMS (Laboratory Information Management System) and hope to have it completed in the near future.

Investigations –

Both investigative supervisors, Jodi and Sami have worked to reduce the scene response times. Covering 70K square miles of the state, the current average scene response time is 1 hour 25 minutes.

This fiscal year we were given appropriations to hire 4 additional investigators to cover the high-volume areas.

New vehicles have been added to our fleet. They are more comfortable and efficient for the investigators.

Permit turnaround time –

Permit turnaround time has decreased slightly to 11 hours 59 minutes. The goal is to have permits issued in 48 hours (2 business days) or less.

Toxicology lab –

The toxicology lab is one of the top five busiest toxicology laboratories in the country in terms of caseload. Dr. Phil Kemp has come back to the agency on a contract basis to perform analytical work on less complex cases. This helps relieve some of the workload from the other toxicologist who are working on ISO accreditation.

Deputy Chief Toxicologist, Dr. Kacey Cliburn is the new president elect of the Southwestern Association of Toxicologists (SAT).

Part of the renovation plan also includes remodeling part of the toxicology laboratory. This will allow for the addition of personnel along with wet and dry workspace.

Legislation –

Senate Bill 707 has become multifaceted. Initially the bill started with how the Medical Examiner's office notifies families of the type of examination or procedure performed on their loved one. It now includes eliminating liability for physicians who might be hesitant to sign death certificates, imposing a timeline for conclusion of investigations by the Medical Examiner's Office (with some exceptions), along with a few other items. It is Dr. Pfeifer's understanding that this bill is now dormant, however, it is still a topic of conversation. Commissioner Reed with the Oklahoma State Department of Health organized a multi-disciplinary group to address the death certificate process in the State of Oklahoma.

Priority project –

The priority project for the agency has been and will continue to be National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) reaccreditation. We are approximately 5 forensic pathologists short of what would be required to achieve accreditation.

Mr. Reed asked about the availability of contract or part time forensic pathologists. Dr. Pfeifer informed the Board that 2 individuals have approached him for this reason. One is a previous OCME employee who agreed to perform contract work. She will not be taking pediatric or homicide cases.

Financial update –

The complete picture of the financial reports shows the available cash continues to grow. As of March 31st, we are at \$9.7M. The agency is currently spending less than we're bringing in. The big expenditures are starting to slow down.

Dr. Pfeifer thinks the agency is at the point where some of this carryover could be used to fund the expansion of the 3rd floor. We are in the beginning phases of discussions with the building owner, Wiggin Properties. We will work with them to determine what this will add to the monthly rental payment. Most of the expense will come with the buildout, and furniture, fixtures and equipment. We don't anticipate the monthly utilities to increase much.

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

Dr. Lanter advised the workload has put stresses on the office. Tulsa currently has 2 openings for FPs. They have seen little interest for these positions; however, they anticipate an increase by the end of the current academic year.

The current fellow will join the practice in July, giving them 6 full-time staff. This is a first for the Tulsa office.

The Tulsa practice has been in their new facility almost a year and are already short of office space for staff. Oklahoma State University (OSU) has been approached about expanding. They are unable to accommodate the request at this time because they have other projects. Dr. Lanter is hopeful the current space will be sufficient for the next 2-3 years and added they will revisit this with OSU in 6 months.

Tulsa County District Attorney, Steve Kunzweiler invited representatives from OCME to speak at the committee for the Tulsa County opioid settlement. The committee oversee the appropriations from the lawsuit settlement. Since the OCME was affected by the increase in opiate deaths, he asked them to outline their experiences and stresses. A PowerPoint presentation was put together by investigative supervisor, Sami Richardson and toxicologists Dr. Jesse Kemp, and Dr. Kacey Cliburn for the meeting. The agency could potentially receive an allocation from this settlement.

Ms. Spurlock motioned to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Magguilli seconded the motion. Roll was called and were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 2:29 pm.