New York StateWide Senior Action Council
Teach In

February 28, 2023

“Learn About Autopsies and the Role of the Coroner”

Speaker: Margaret Luck, Fulton County Coroner
Fulton County Coroner’s Office

• The coroner's office investigations are independent; but we work alongside other agencies.

• Through our actions we represent those who can no longer represent themselves.
Under Public Health Law 673

• What types of deaths are required to be investigated?

A coroner or medical examiner has jurisdiction and authority to investigate the death of every person dying within his county, or whose body is found within the county, which is or appears to be:

• (a) A violent death, whether by criminal violence, suicide or casualty;
• (b) A death caused by unlawful act or criminal neglect;
• (c) A death occurring in a suspicious, unusual or unexplained manner;
• (d) A death caused by suspected criminal abortion;
• (e) A death while unattended by a physician, so far as can be discovered, or where no physician able to certify the cause of death as provided in the public health law and in form as prescribed by the commissioner of health can be found;
• (f) A death of a person confined in a public institution other than a hospital, infirmary or nursing home.
• (g) A death under 24 hours of admission of a hospital or any death after an invasive procedure in a hospital.
## Roles as Coroners

- Ruling on cause of death.
- Ruling on manner of death.
- Identification of the victim.
- Interview family/ friends
- Key point of contact for family
  - autopsy, organ donation & funeral arrangement.
- Obtain all Medical Information
- Prepare reports for State & Local Agencies.

### Estimated Fulton County Cases

- Natural: 80%
- Homicide: 3%
- Suicide: 5%
- Accidental: 10%
- Undetermined: 2%
Manner of Death

- Natural
- Accidental
- Homicide
- Suicide
- Undetermined Circumstance
- Pending Investigation
Cause of Death

How to determine the Cause:

• Scene Investigation
• Interview with families/friends
• Medical History – PCP
• Medical Records
• Prescription Drugs on scene
• Autopsy
Autopsies
May not always tell you what is there, but it will tell you what is not.

- Detailed examination of the deceased to find the cause of death and manner of death.
- Autopsy also help in identification.
- Autopsies are performed by Medical Examiners, Forensic Pathologist or Pathologist.
- Not all death are autopsy
- Fulton County 35% go before the Medical Examiner
Who would order the autopsy and who would perform the autopsy?

In the ME/Coroner system the Coroner/Medical Examiner can order the autopsy.

• Autopsy are done by:
• Medical Examiner  (750 in the united states)
• Forensic Pathologist
• Pathologist
At the autopsy...

• Autopsy takes approx. 2-3 hours
• X-rays may be taken
• Blood is taken for toxicology
• Histology - microscopic exams
• Visual documentation
• Internal documentation
• Photographs taken

• Completion of the death Certificate.
• Coroner/ME speaks with and reviews finding with family.
• Decedent is released to funeral home.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hospital Deaths</th>
<th>Nursing Home deaths</th>
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<td>• Most Hospital’s do offer autopsies.</td>
<td>• Usually not autopsied.</td>
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<td>• The autopsy would be done by their pathologist.</td>
<td>• Nursing homes have Medical Directors that would sign the death certificate.</td>
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<td>• Family should discuss this with the doctor/hospital personnel as soon as possible.</td>
<td>• But...</td>
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<td>• FYI, families usually are asked about donations at this time.</td>
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• Autopsy Reports

Release to Immediate family by filling out request form.

Autopsy reports take time, earliest could be 6 weeks; but it could be longer.
Private Autopsies

• A Private Autopsy, is an autopsy requested and consented by the family or next of kin and is performed independent of a hospital, medical examiner, or coroner.

Why?
• Second Opinion
• Death occurred overseas
• For genetic/hereditary conditions
• Question regards to quality of care
• Ascertain whether clinical diagnoses were correct
ANY QUESTIONS
Thank YOU!

Questions or concerns
Fulton County Coroner Office  223 West Main Street, Johnstown N.Y.

Margaret Luck  Coroner/ABMDI
mluck@fultoncountyny.gov
518-774-7405

Sherry Brown Deputy Coroner
Sbrown@fultoncountyny.gov
518-470-7008