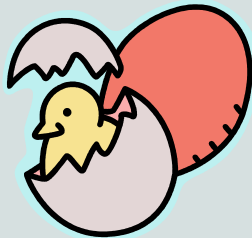




The Examiner

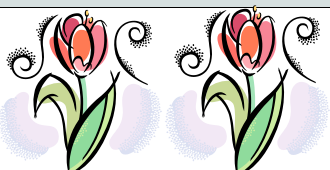
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Spring 2011



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

President's Message	1
Shift in WCMEA	1
The Choking Game	2
Texting and Driving	2
Forensic Training	3
Rock County	3
Interesting Cases	4 & 5
Severe Weather	5
Dane County	6
Grief Counseling Tips	6 & 7
Upcoming Training	7



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I am desperately trying to think of topics other than the Budget Repair Bill and the Biennium Budget to discuss. Nevertheless, it seems that this is something that will affect you and me more than any other topic we have had to address.

Just when we were starting to make strides for fair compensation within our profession it would appear that this will come to a screeching halt and perhaps even go backward if the Governor gets his way. I, like most, agree that we all need to give a little in order to get our state and local governments back on their feet, but I certainly do not want to contribute a lion's share either. Most certainly once the shared revenue is slashed we will be asked to continue to do more with less.....Super-Sized.

I spend many hours looking for budget items that I could reduce or eliminate while maintaining the integrity of the office. Autopsies? Toxicology? Transportation? Education? . . . The list could go on and on. It has never been more important than now to work together to increase efficiencies.

Have conversations with your neighboring counties, big or small, and find out what is working for them and what is not. Look for alternatives that may reduce your costs. Look for ways to increase your revenue. It is very unlikely that we will get any sort of legislative action this year to make the necessary changes to 979, as that would require cooperation on both sides of the aisle. So, in the interim, continue to promote

yourselves and your staff within the community. Be polite. Be professional. Be vigilant. Survive!

See you at the conference.
AI

Shift in WCMEA Board of Directors

On February 9, 2011, PJ Schoebel, Dodge County Medical Examiner and WCMEA Second Vice President, announced his resignation from the Board of Directors (BOD). After serving on the BOD for several years, Schoebel was voted into the position of Second VP at the 2010 June Conference.

Following Schoebel's resignation, President AI Klimek has appointed Scott Rifleman as his replacement to finish out the year term. Rifleman is the Coroner for Portage County, and has been a dedicated member of the WCMEA and to the BOD as the Legislative Committee Chairperson. Congratulations to Scott Rifleman on the appointment of Second Vice President.



Pictured above: Scott Rifleman

The Choking Game - A Closer Look



“Choking Game Led to Teen’s Death on Bowflex.”
“Choking Game Takes Life of 12-Year-Old Erik Robinson.”
“Nebraska Boy Dies Playing The Choking Game.”
“6th-Grade Boy Dies Playing Choking Game.”
“Deaths of 2 Teens Prompt Police Alert About Choking Game.”

These are just a few of the national headlines from 2010. Despite the community education and media attention, the dangers of the choking game are not fully understood by the youths engaging in the behavior. As the warmer Wisconsin seasons near, so does a greater opportunity for our youngsters to engage in risky behaviors with their peers. As investigators, it is important to be informed about the activities and risks our youths are participating in, and consider them as we conduct our medicolegal death investigations.

The Choking Game has been around for decades, but is known by many names including Pass-out, Space Monkey, Space Cowboy, Blackout, Flatliner, Roulette . . . just to highlight a few. It is the act of intentionally suffocating, oneself or a peer, for the purpose of achieving a brief high. With or without bonds (ropes, scarves, belts, etc.), the “game” can be played in groups, or alone.

The children who are engaging in this kind of behavior are usually between the ages of 9 and 16 years, and considered “good kids.” These are the kids that are strong academically, involved in sports or other extracurricular activities, and are not involved with drugs or alcohol. Though as many as 250-1000 deaths are estimated to occur annually as a result of the choking game, statistics are not accurately tracked. This is because many of the cases are reported as suicides.

The following warning signs could indicate that a youngster is playing the choking game: Discussion of the game; bloodshot eyes; marks on the neck; frequent headaches; disorientation after spending time alone; ropes, scarves, or belts tied to bedroom furniture or doorknobs; notches to the bedposts, etc. As we conduct our interviews, it is important to consider the warning signs, and incorporate them in our line of questioning. It is also pertinent to obtain input from siblings or peers to provide a different perspective than that of the parents.

Adolescents will take risks. With knowledge, community education and outreach; however, the risks can become less deadly.

For more information about the choking game, please visit the G.A.S.P. (Games Adolescents Shouldn’t Play) at www.gaspinfo.com

Texting and Driving - A Deadly Combination



According to the US Government research released in fall 2010, distracted driving fatalities due to cell phone use and texting has soared. Researchers estimated that between 2001 and 2007, more than 16,000 deaths nationwide were due to texting alone. Last year, more than 5,000 fatalities were related to distracted driving.

In response to these frightening statistics, Wisconsin joins 29 other states in initiating a texting while driving ban. Effective December 1, 2010, drivers face fines of \$20-\$400 for their first offense along with four points assessed on their driving records. A second offense will cost drivers between \$200 and \$800. This new law is considered primary, which means law enforcement officers can stop motorists suspected of this offense alone. According to statute however, officers are able to issue inattentive driving citations that carry a \$188 fine, even if there is some question.

With this new legislation as well as increased education for new drivers, the statistics should take a turn in a positive direction.

Forensic Death Investigator Training

In December 2010, I had the opportunity to attend “Forensic Specialties in Death Investigation” training in New York City. Several investigators from Wisconsin have taken advantage of this training, which is provided free of charge. In addition, transportation and lodging costs are covered! A meal allowance is also provided.

The course ran from Monday morning until Friday evening. A bus transported the attendees between the hotel and the training site. There were thirty investigators from around the country who attended.

The classes were held at the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, where Ed Wallace is the acting Director of Forensic Training. Various specialists who work within that office instructed the curriculum. Some of the topics covered in the course included: The Investigator as an Expert Witness, Photographic Documentation of the Scene, Forensic Anthropology Laboratory Analysis, Forensic Anthropology Field Recovery and Documentation, Forensic Biology Workshop: DNA in the Lab and Field, Bloodstain Pattern Analysis, Disaster Victim Identification and Family Assistance Center, and Mass Fatality Field Management Exercise: Disaster Morgue Operations.



Attendees participated in an exercise demonstrating blood spatter at the Forensic Specialties in Death Investigation training

For those interested in attending, or obtaining further information, please contact Casey Joe at:
*Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Forensic Sciences Training Program, 421 E. 26th Street
New York, NY 10016 Phone: 212-323-1505 Fax: 646-500-5767
Email: ForensicTraining@ocme.nyc.gov*

Submitted by Jon Hagen, Outagamie County Chief Deputy Coroner

Rock County to Join Dane in Medical Examiner Transition

In four years, the elected coroner position in Rock County will be replaced with an appointed medical examiner. The Rock County Board approved the change on Thursday, January 27, 2011. Jenifer Keach, Coroner of Rock County, was re-elected in November and will complete her term, which ends in January 2015. Rock County has made no decisions regarding staffing or structure, but has ample time to develop a job description and qualifications for the new position.

Interesting cases handled by Wisconsin's death investigators.....compiled by Jon Hagen

- In Shawano County, a 40-year-old woman and her 18-year-old son died when their vehicle pulled out in front of an SUV while crossing Highway 29. Four people in the SUV were injured.
- In Racine County, the body of a 52-year-old woman was found under three feet of snow during a storm. Her car was found a short distance away in a ditch.
- In Milwaukee, at least three men died after shoveling snow during the February blizzard that affected much of the nation.
- In Rock County, a 47-year-old man was arrested in connection with the suspected homicide of a 31-year-old woman whose body was found covered with snow in a ditch in January. Police believe the man was trying to cover up their affair. The suspect's son is the father of the decedent's two-year-old daughter.
- In Milwaukee County, a 41-year-old male inmate at a county correctional facility died. The man was incarcerated for his 5th OWI and felony bail jumping.
- In Marathon County, a 38-year-old woman died when her car went out of control and was crushed under a truck which was carrying liquid propane.
- In Manitowoc County, a 34-year-old man died while snowmobiling on a frozen river. He hit a downed tree branch, ejecting him from the snowmobile.
- In Milwaukee, a 23-year-old man drowned when he fell through the ice on Lake Michigan at a marina. The man and his girlfriend were taking photos.
- In Brown County, a 41-year-old bicyclist died in a hit-and-run accident.
- In Kenosha County, a 30-year-old woman died in an apartment fire.
- In Bayfield County, a 45-year-old man died when his snowmobile struck a car after he failed to stop at a stop sign. Alcohol was a factor in the death.
- In Taylor County, a 67-year-old man died after he broke through ice after walking near an aerator on a pond.
- In Milwaukee, a 30-year-old woman died of stab wounds, allegedly after a domestic dispute with a 35-year-old man. He was arrested.
- In Waupaca County, a 45-year-old man was found in a snow-covered field. He had been missing for two days.
- In Fond du Lac County, a 27-year-old man died when his vehicle collided with a semi.
- In Racine County, a man died when his clothing became entangled in machinery at a recycling factory.
- In Outagamie County, a 19-year-old man died after his stalled vehicle was struck from behind on a highway. The man was sitting inside the car when he was hit.
- In Juneau County, a 17-year-old girl died after she crashed her snowmobile on a trail.
- In Milwaukee, a 50-year-old man died when he was struck by a hit-and-run driver.
- In Racine County, the body of a 46-year-old man was found inside a burning car which had struck a tree.
- In Racine County, a 23-year-old man died in a freak accident. A bus carrying college students returning from a ski trip lost a tire, which struck the man's oncoming vehicle.
- In Calumet County, a 59-year-old man died after his truck broke through the ice of Lake Winnebago.
- In Winnebago County, a pedestrian died after being hit while walking on Highway 41.
- In Milwaukee County, an 83-year-old man died when the vehicle he was riding in was broadsided by another vehicle that they had turned in front of.
- In Lafayette County, a 24-year-old man died after his snowmobile left a trail and hit a tree.
- In Marathon County, a woman in her 60's died after her frozen body was found in her driveway.
- In Oneida County, a 69-year-old man died after crashing his snowmobile.

Continued on next page

- In Ashland County, a snowmobiler came across the body of a 23-year-old male cross-country skier who had been killed by a hit-and-run driver. The alleged driver, 16, did not turn himself in to police hours after the body was found.
- In Shawano County, an autopsy was planned in the case of a 21-year-old man who was dropped off at a hospital ER in “extreme medical distress.” The man died a short time later. Police located another man who brought the man to the hospital and then fled on foot.
- In Dodge County, the body of a 47-year-old woman was found lying at the side of a highway.
- In Rock County, a 51-year-old man died of his injuries four days after crashing his vehicle into two parked cars. Police had charged the man with drunk driving.
- In Milwaukee County, a 50-year-old man was sentenced to life in prison for the homicides of 7 women over a 20-year period. Authorities discovered that his DNA profile was missing from the state’s database; they feel if that had not occurred, they may have been able to arrest the man before his last murder in 2007.
- In Columbia County, a man, now 50, was convicted of a 1980 homicide. Authorities said the man beat and strangled an 18-year-old woman who was the wife of his high school friend. The woman’s body was discovered by her husband when he returned home after working a night shift. The couple’s 3-month-old child was unharmed in a nearby crib.
- In Washington County, a 63-year-old male inmate at the County Correctional Facility collapsed and died shortly after telling guards he was short of breath.
- In Rock County, the bodies of a couple were found dead in the basement of their residence. Police believe the pair had a suicide pact; a gun was found at the scene. They were said to have had health and financial problems.
- In Rock County, two men, ages 19 and 20, were killed and a third person was critically injured when their vehicle passed another on a hill, went out of control and struck a concrete culvert.
- In Dane County, a 44-year-old woman was killed by a 51-year-old drunk driver who then fled the scene, later striking a bridge, car and finally a tree. The woman has been convicted of three prior DUI’s.

Severe Wisconsin Weather – Spring is no Exception

A true Wisconsinite knows that April showers bring more than just May flowers. Tornado season peaks from April through August, bringing on average 21 tornadoes annually. Last year, the National Weather Service confirmed 46 tornadoes in Wisconsin! Though there were no fatalities in 2010, there were approximately 22 people injured and between 25 and 30 million dollars in property damage reported.

Governor Scott Walker has designated the week of April 11-April 15, 2011 as Tornado and Severe Weather Awareness Week. Preparedness is the key to safety and success. As tornado season closes in, test your knowledge to find out if you are ready:

True or False: Locations near a body of water (lakes, rivers) or a hill are safe from tornadoes. The answer is *false*. There is no such thing as a safe place in regards to tornadoes.

True or False: Windows should be opened as a tornado approaches to minimize damage and equalize pressure. This answer is also *false*. Personal safety should be your top priority. Leave the windows as they are, and seek shelter.

True or False: Do not seek shelter under highway overpasses if caught in the open. *True!* The winds of a tornado could actually increase in the tight space of an overpass. Absolutely seek shelter in a sturdy building if possible. If there is no available shelter, get into a vehicle where you can fasten the seatbelt and place your head below the window, or find an area lower than the roadway or ground, lie flat, and cover your head with your hands.

Wisconsin weather has the potential to be dangerous, and even deadly. For further review of the safety tips, please visit the website for Wisconsin Emergency Management at: www.emergencymanagement.wi.gov

The New Year Begins a New Era for Dane County

As of January 3, 2011, the Dane County Coroner's Office made the much-anticipated transition into a Medical Examiner's Office. John Stanley and successor Ray Wosepka worked to orchestrate the process in years past. Finally, in 2011, their hard work has come to fruition. With the new structure and growing population of nearly 500,000 citizens, Dane County appointed its first Medical Examiner.



Dr. Vincent Tranchida, an experienced forensic pathologist, began his post as Dane County Medical Examiner on February 1, 2011. He comes to Wisconsin following six years of service for the Office of Chief Medical Examiner in New York City. Though Tranchida found excitement and educational opportunity in New York, he longed to return to the Midwest where he was born and raised. Dr. Tranchida, and his older brother, grew up in Michigan where their father practiced internal medicine and taught at a local university. He credits his father to providing insight and inspiration to his career. In regards to his decision to go into forensics Tranchida states, "I think my choice of specialization developed fairly organically. As I pursued my interests in medicine, I found that I enjoyed working trauma medicine, solving puzzles, and working with my hands. While for a few years I considered the field of surgery, I eventually did an elective at the Wayne County Medical Examiner's Office in Detroit and realized that forensic pathology was a much better fit."

Dr. Tranchida finds great joy in sharing his experiences and knowledge in the educational setting. He explains, "Teaching not only forces you to stay abreast of the current data, but also helps you be a part of the future of forensics, through what you impart to those that will come after you. Also, in our line of work there is often great sadness and tragedy. If we can use what we learn to help us impart knowledge to future generations of death investigators, some good can come of it." Tranchida has lectured on a variety of topics within his specialty over the years, and hopes to continue his efforts in Dane County. Though presently he is not involved with the University of Wisconsin-Madison in regards to education, Dr. Tranchida is hopeful that he can develop a close relationship with the institution in the future. He firmly believes; however, that the Medical Examiner's Office serves as an excellent learning resource for forensic and autopsy medicine.

With a few weeks under his belt, Dr. Tranchida has been able to evaluate his office and expectations for his position. He strongly believes that the greatest asset to his office is his staff, stating, "I am very fortunate to have a dedicated, hardworking staff that is not only experienced and skilled, but also (and just as critical) empathetic and kind." When asked about his greatest challenge, he responded, "coordinating the growth of the office with the expected growing needs of the community. I look forward to the challenge, however, and I feel that the office has great county support."

Though the Dane County Medical Examiner's Office is testing new waters, it appears to have the strength and leadership necessary to overcome any challenge.

Congratulations to Dane County, and to Dr. Tranchida on behalf of the WCMEA. We look forward to the journey ahead.

Grief Counseling – Tips for the Death Investigator

Grief is something that we encounter on a daily basis. Though we are not licensed psychotherapists, as investigators we too counsel families during some of the most devastating moments in their lives. Unfortunately, reactions to grief can be as unique as the individuals who experience them. Aside from the raw emotions, there are gender and cultural biases as well that make it difficult to prepare ourselves in the field. To be our best, we must first understand the stages of grief.

Continued on next page.

Grief Counseling – Tips for the Death Investigator *Continued*

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross described grief in five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. People move through these stages in their own way, and at their own pace. Not everyone experiences all of the stages, or move through them in any given order. As unpredictable as grief can be, there are some helpful hints to assist us in providing an optimal, comfortable environment for the family members that we serve. Listed below, are some suggested dos and don'ts to consider.



- Do make eye contact with the person experiencing the grief.
- Do reflect a caring, relaxed facial expression.
- Do sit at the same level as the individual.
- Do use a natural, warm tone of voice when addressing the grieving individual.
- Do allow ample time for the grieving individual to respond.
- Don't respond too quickly.
- Don't let your gaze wander from the grieving individual.
- Don't watch the clock.
- Don't give advice, or lecture the person experiencing the grief.
- Don't ask too many questions.

Though our initial contact with the survivors is important, our services, resources, and expertise are limited. Often times the individuals experiencing the grief need follow-up services that we are unable to provide. It is beneficial to become familiar with local law enforcement agencies to determine which departments have chaplains and/or social workers available. For those investigators who do not have access to such services, an abundance of bereavement material is available for no cost online.

To find other helpful tips regarding grief or bereavement counseling, please review the “*Grief Counseling Resource Guide*” provided by the New York State Office of Mental Health at www.omh.state.ny.us.

Upcoming Training Opportunities

WCMEA Annual Spring Conference April 4-6, 2011
Mead Hotel in Wisconsin Rapids
Contact Angela Hinze: angela.hinze@co.columbia.wi.us

Forensic Anthropology for Law Enforcement,
sponsored by Missouri Western State University and the
Southern Institute of Forensic Science. May 23-28, 2011.
To be held in Saint Joseph, MO. For more information
contact: Darcy Groce, 816-271-4207 or
groce@missouriwestern.edu

Field Methods in Forensic Anthropology, May 30-June 3,
2011. To be held at the University of Tennessee in
Knoxville, TN. Contact: Rebecca Taylor, fac@utk.edu or
865-974-4408

Masters 14 Conference for Advanced Death Investigation.
Sponsored by Saint Louis University School of Medicine. To
be held in St. Louis, MO. July 25-28, 2011. Contact Mary
Fran Ernst or Julie Howe. 314-977-5970 or

Basic Facial Reconstruction Sculpture. To be held at the
University of Oklahoma in Norman, OK. October 3-7, 2011.

Contact: Betty Pat Gatliff 405-321-8706

Basic Bloodstain Pattern Analysis Workshop. Presented by the
Specialized Training Unit at the Miami-Dade Public Safety
Training Institute in Doral, FL. Contact: Toby L. Wolson, MS.
305-471-2052 or twolson@mdpd.com

Medicolegal Investigation of Death. May 4-6, 2011. Sponsored
by Wayne State University. To be held in Dearborn, MI. For
registration information call 313-577-1180 or
dcme@med.wayne.edu

Year-round education. West Virginia University Online
Continuing Education Forensic Courses. Contact:
Robin Bowen 304-293-6214 or
<http://www.elearn.wvu.edu/continuing/index.htm>

WAHI 2011 Annual Training Seminar April 27-29, 2011
Blue Harbor Resort in Sheboygan, Wisconsin
www.wi-homicide.org

Patrice Hall & Jennifer Schroeter
Waukesha ME's Office
515 W. Moreland Boulevard
Waukesha, WI 53188
(262) 548-7575

Members, Let's Hop To It!

The Examiner is looking for interesting case investigations, as well as special WCMEA members to highlight in the summer publication.

Please forward any case reports or personal entries to editors Patrice Hall or Jennifer Schroeter via e-mail: phall@waukeshacounty.gov or jschroeter@waukeshacounty.gov

Or mail your entries to:
Waukesha County Medical Examiner's Office
515 W. Moreland Boulevard
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