



The Examiner

<http://www.wcmea.com>

Fall 2024 Issue



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Greetings WCMEA Members,

I hope you all had a good fall! As we move into the winter months, remember to check on your staff and neighboring C/ME's. The winter months always seem to be very long, with the amount of snow, cold and shorter days. These can be very stressful. Remember though, spring is right around the corner! With that brings warmer weather and blooming flowers. This is always something to look forward to.

There are many changes happening with the new board of directors and committee members. The website is seeing many new changes. The legislative committee remains on top of anything coming down that will affect how C/ME's operate.

As always, stay safe out there!

Crystal Schaub, WCMEA President



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| President's Message | 1 |
| SUDORS Update | 2 |
| Did You Know? | 2 |
| NamUs Tribal Liaison | 3 |
| George Smith Dies | 4 |
| DHS Reminder | 5 |
| Interesting Deaths | 6-7 |
| Training Opportunities | 8 |

A Poem for Grieving Hearts

For many, the holiday season is full of wonder and good cheer. For those who have experienced a loss; however, grief is palpable this time of year – perhaps even unbearable. In honor of all those who are struggling this holiday season, a beautiful poem. Please know that you are not alone.

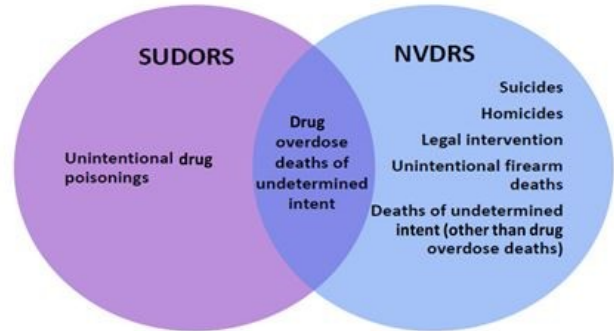
Bone deep,
that's where
the ache lives.
Memories of you
carried inside
like an old wound,
never fully healed.

-JOHN GREEN



State Unintentional Drug Overdose Reporting System Update

Lindsay Emer, NVDRS and SUDORS coordinator with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, recently shared exciting news: Wisconsin's Unintentional Drug Overdose Reporting System (SUDORS) will finally be included in the Centers for Disease Control's dataset and dashboard! Why now? Per Lindsay to WCMEA: "Because of **you**, Wisconsin data is now helping inform drug overdose prevention efforts at the national level." We were included because DHS received Coroner / Medical Examiner and toxicology reports for at least 75% of drug overdose deaths – thank you for helping us get there!



While it's true that NVDRS (National Violent Death Reporting System) and SUDORS can extrapolate data from death certificates, that information cannot compare to our investigation. Our investigative reports contain so much more than what is on a death certificate. We are telling the story of our decedents to include listing any substances and/or paraphernalia noted on scene, suspected method of ingestion, and the decedent's medical, social and recent histories. The context is imperative when we are looking at prevention.

The same can be said for sharing toxicology results. While the death certificate may say gunshot wound to chest / homicide, what were the events leading up to death? What were the toxicology results? Is there a correlation on alcohol use and suicides? The list of questions our investigations answer is endless.

And finally, those families we serve would give anything for this death to have not occurred. Our participation with NVDRS and SUDORS is a step in that direction.

If your office is having difficulty in submitting data or are just not sure what should be sent – reach out to Lindsay (lindsayr.emer@dhs.wisconsin.gov or 608-720-8013). Her team, along with our national partners, are constantly working on ways to streamline data sharing. They understand that our first responsibility is to investigate the deaths and will work with us to make submission as painless as possible.

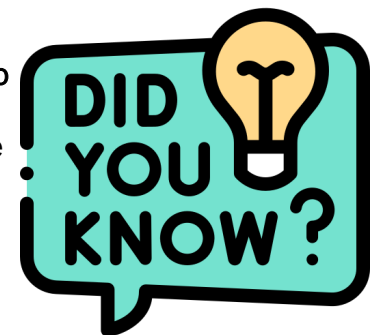
Kudos to Wisconsin for increasing our submission...and let's see if each one of our counties can match Milwaukee's 100% submission rate for 2025! Game on...

Gina Carver, Walworth County Medical Examiner

Did you know?

National Grief Awareness Week is an annual event held from **December 2 to December 8** to raise awareness about grief, loss, and bereavement. The week encourages open conversations about grief, provides support to those affected by loss, and educates communities on how to better support individuals experiencing grief.

Mark your calendars! **January 19-25, 2025** is **Medicolegal Death Investigation Professionals Week**! Take advantage of this time to recognize and honor the contributions of professionals in the field of medicolegal death investigation.



An Introduction to Cornelia Perry, Tribal Liaison for NamUs

Cornelia Perry serves as the Tribal Liaison for the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs). She is a citizen of the Navajo Nation and had served as a criminal investigator for a police department within the Navajo Nation. Perry joined NamUs in 2021, aiming to bridge gaps between Tribal nations and federal resources. She works on improving the reporting and investigation of missing persons cases, particularly within Indigenous communities, which often face systemic challenges, mistrust, and a lack of resources.



In her role, Perry focuses on building trust between Tribal communities and law enforcement, advocating for the use of forensic tools like DNA analysis, and enhancing outreach and education about NamUs. Her experience handling missing persons cases and navigating jurisdictional complexities makes her an essential advocate for addressing the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous people in the U.S. Since Perry's start in 2021, NamUs reported seeing a 20 percent increase in Tribal case entries.

When asked about her personal goals as Tribal Liaison and a memorable success story, Perry responded:

“My personal goals in the position is to register and train all Tribal Law Enforcement across the United States, and if I can, get it mandated for usage of NamUs for every Tribal Agency.

As for a success story, Christine Lester went missing from Indian Wells, Arizona on May 5, 1987, her body was discovered in Madera County, California on May 21, 1987. A statewide bulletin was released by the county, yet they found no missing women matching her description; this case quickly went cold. In 2020, a new deputy decided to reopen the case of Jane Doe and exhume her. In March 2023, the DNA profile from Jane Doe matched the one submitted by Christine's brother (DNA collected by Dilkon Police, Navajo Nation and submitted to NamUs). Christine Lester was positively identified March 2023, and her death was ruled a homicide.”

The Kenosha County Medical Examiner's Office had the pleasure of meeting Perry earlier this year, as resolution came for a 1993 John Doe case. After many years of hard work, and with the assistance of multiple agencies including NamUs, Kenosha County Medical Examiner Patrice Hall was able to positively identify John Doe. He was identified as Ronald L. Dodge, a native of Keshena, Wisconsin, on the Menomonie Reservation. By giving Ronald his name back, Hall was able to reunite Ronald's remains with his family. Both Hall and Perry spoke during a [press conference](#). Perry provides support to Tribal communities and agencies investigating cases like this one.

If your C/ME office is interested in consulting with Perry regarding missing/unidentified cases, she can be reached at corneliaperry.contractor@rti.org.

Former Marinette County Coroner Dies

George Smith died on October 15, 2024 with family by his side. George was 81 years old, and had lived a long life of dedicated service.

According to his obituary, George served in the National Guard from 1964 until 1970. He was a member of the Marinette County Fire Department for 25 years, and worked for the Marinette County Coroner's Office. In 1975, George started as a deputy coroner and remained in that role for 11 years. In 1986, George was elected Coroner and he held that office for 33 years before he retired in 2019. During his time as Coroner, George was a long-time member of the WCMEA where he developed and fostered professional relationships with so many of you!



Following George Smith's retirement, Marinette County transitioned from Coroner to Medical Examiner Office. Kalynn Van Ermen was appointed as the first Medical Examiner and remains in that position today.

Kalynn provided the following statement: "I had the privilege of working with George Smith during the changeover from Coroner to Medical Examiner. In my short time of knowing him, it was clear he loved being the Coroner for Marinette County and took pride in his work. He loved this community and will be greatly missed."

Former law enforcement colleagues also wished to offer a few words in honor of George.

"I worked with George for a long time, on the road and in Investigations. While George's delivery was direct and to the point, some didn't like that, I thought about how many times he had to meet with people and give them the news over such a long career, it was good he was to the point. While direct and to the point, he was compassionate and understanding and being to the point helped the family know he was serious and was covering all the bases. George would explain the process and work with the family and Law Enforcement in any way possible.

I always liked George's sense of humor. A guy who has seen just about everything, not much phased him and adding some lighthearted conversation helped everyone get through what is an unenviable task.

George's dedication and devotion to the County and it's citizens will be missed. "

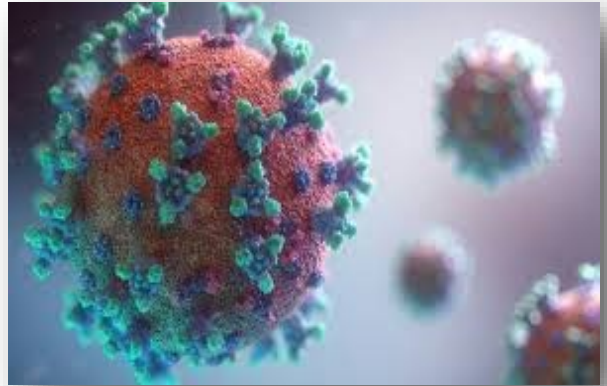
- *Lieutenant Christ Lesperance, Marinette County Sheriff's Office*

"Over the years, I had the opportunity to work with George Smith in his capacity as the Marinette County Coroner on many different scenes. I was always impressed with his dedication to the work that he performed no matter the time or day. Marinette County was fortunate to have him serving in this capacity for so many years."

- *Sheriff Randy Miller, Marinette County Sheriff's Office*

C/ME Reminder from Wisconsin Department of Health Services

Coroners and medical examiners are among the designated professionals required to [report](#) the notifiable diseases and conditions listed in [Wis. Admin Code. ch. DHS 145-Appendix A](#) to state and local public health agencies in the timeframes stated in [DHS 145.04 \(3\)](#).



This reminder comes after the Department of Health Services (DHS) has become aware that some coroners and medical examiners may not be aware of what diseases and conditions need to be reported or the process for reporting them to local or state public health agencies.

The diseases and conditions that must be reported, and the timeframe and methods of reporting can be found in [Reportable Communicable Disease Conditions in Wisconsin](#).

In addition, DHS recommends that decedent death abstracts be completed with as much known information relating to the immediate cause of death, along with any diseases, injuries, or complications that contributed to death.

Death abstracts are monitored by an epidemiologist at DHS and serve as an important part of statewide surveillance of acute and chronic diseases and conditions among Wisconsin residents.

For additional information or questions regarding the reporting requirements for notifiable diseases and conditions, please reach out to the local or Tribal health officer in your jurisdiction. Otherwise please contact DHS Respiratory Disease Epidemiologist Thomas Haupt at 608-266-5326, or Thomas.haupt@dhs.wisconsin.gov.

Thomas Haupt, DHS Respiratory Disease Epidemiologist

Don't Fall Behind WCMEA!

The Examiner is in search of interesting case investigations, as well as WCMEA

members to highlight in future publications.

Please submit your case reports or personal entries to any of the newsletter committee members below:



Tina Forrest: Tina.Forrest@sccwi.gov
Lynn Johnson: ljohnson@co.dunn.wi.us
Jen Schroeter: Jennifer.schroeter@kenoshacountywi.gov



Interesting Deaths in Wisconsin.....



- **In Dane County-** A 46-year old woman was found dead at the Dane County jail. The woman was found unresponsive in a housing unit in the Public Safety Building portion of the jail. Deputies and jail medical staff began life-saving efforts but were unsuccessful. The woman faced charges of retail theft, theft of movable property and bail jumping. The death remains under investigation.
- **In Eau Claire County-** A 56-year old woman was found dead with multiple gunshot wounds near downtown Eau Claire while conducting a welfare check. The Eau Claire Police Department and Wisconsin State Patrol processed the crime scene and processed evidence. The death was ruled a homicide.
- **In Eau Claire County-** A 59-year old man believed to be connected to the homicide was found dead with an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound days later. The man and homicide victim were siblings.
- **In Fond du Lac County-** An 89-year old man died in a plane crash. The Sheriff's Office received several reports of a possible plane crash. Deputies responded to the area and found a small aircraft in the middle of a cornfield. The man, who had been piloting the plane, appeared to have significant injuries and was trapped inside the aircraft. First responders were able to extricate the pilot; however, he succumbed to his injuries before he could be transported from the scene.
- **In Kenosha County-** Authorities announced they had identified a "John Doe" homicide victim who had been found dead in 1993 along the Soo Line (now Canadian Pacific) railroad tracks in Pleasant Prairie near the Illinois border. The agencies used technology that was not available at the time of the death to positively identify Ronald Dodge. The decedent's remains have returned to his family on the Menominee Indian Reservation in northeastern Wisconsin.
- **In Kenosha County-** A 72-year old man was found dead after scuba diving on Lake Michigan. The man was scuba diving to explore the SS Wisconsin shipwreck. The US Coast Guard received a distress call when the diver had not returned to the surface. Numerous agencies responded to assist in the search operation, which became a recovery operation.
- **In Manitowoc County-** Two Rivers Police Department confirmed that skeletal remains found were those of a missing 3-year old boy. The boy went missing from his home in February. A deer hunter found the remains in a wooded, privately owned area near a quarry. The boy's mother and her boyfriend remain in jail- both criminally charged with child neglect. A death investigation is now open.
- **In Milwaukee County-** A 63-year old man died after a vehicle submerged in water. The Oak Creek Fire Department reported that the first arriving unit located a vehicle in Lake Michigan around 50 feet from the Bender Park boat launch. The fire department removed one occupant from the vehicle, and the individual was deceased. The Milwaukee Fire Department's Dive Team searched the water surrounding the submerged vehicle and did not locate any additional occupants.

Continued Page 7

Interesting Deaths Continued

- **In Milwaukee County-** A 38-year old was killed in a hit and run crash. Two people in a stolen SUV hit another vehicle head on at a high rate of speed. The driver and passenger of the speeding vehicle fled the scene on foot. The engine of the stolen SUV was found 175 feet away from the vehicle. The 38-year-old driver of the hit vehicle was transported to a nearby hospital with life-threatening injuries. She later died at the hospital.
- **In Racine County-** A Racine man was killed by his girlfriend. Police responded to their home for an assault in progress. The victim's friends took him to a hospital where he later died during surgery. According to reports, the girlfriend found out the man had got another woman pregnant. She confronted the man and stabbed him in the chest. The 22-year old woman has been charged with first-degree intentional homicide.
- **In Rock County-** A 30-year old man was found dead in his jail cell. Reports indicate that a correctional officer was doing a routine security check before 9pm when they discovered that the inmate took his own life. The man was the only one housed in the jail cell. Other officers, medical staff and paramedics attempted resuscitation, but efforts were unsuccessful. The man had been arrested in April on weapons charges. The death remains under investigation.
- **In Walworth County-** A 21-year old woman was shot to death in an off-campus apartment. The woman had been shot multiple times following a fight with her 23-year old boyfriend. The boyfriend was arrested on charges of first-degree intentional homicide.
- **In Waukesha County-** A 74-year old woman was shot and killed by her 24-year old grandson. The two got into an argument after the woman found a gun in her grandson's bedroom. The man shot her six times. Tactical units surrounded the home for more than three hours. A K-9 was sent in and bit the man, allowing officers to grab him. Police found a loaded 9-mm semi-automatic weapon in the home. The man faces charges of first-degree intentional homicide, fail/comply-officer/person in custody, and operate firearm while intoxicated.
- **In Waukesha County-** The body of a 63-year old man was pulled from the Fox River near Frame Park. A forestry crew was working along the Fox River Trail and spotted the body in the river approximately 10 feet from shore. The man was wearing only shorts when he was removed from the water. Additional clothing was found nearby. The death remains under investigation.
- **In Winnebago County-** A 64-year old man was found in Lake Winnebago. The man had been found dead in the lake after his boat was discovered unoccupied. Responding deputies and first responders attempted life-saving measures which were unsuccessful. According to authorities, there was no evidence of trauma; however, the death remains under investigation.
- **In Wood County-** A 40-year old woman was found dead on a road. The death is being investigated as a homicide. According to authorities, all information at this time indicates that the incident had started as a domestic disturbance. A 22-year old man is in police custody.

Jennifer Schroeter
Kenosha County Medical Examiner's Office
1000 55th Street
Kenosha, WI 53140

Training Opportunities

January WCMEA Conference
Eau Claire, WI
January 27-29, 2025
www.wcmea.com

Human Remains Recovery Course
San Marcos, TX
January 13-17, 2025
<https://www.txst.edu/anthropology/facts/workshops/fieldrecovery.html>

Forensic Entomology Workshop
April 14-15, 2025
San Marcos, TX
<https://www.txst.edu/anthropology/facts/workshops/taphonomy.html>

Death Investigation Academy
Online Training
[Death Investigation Academy
\(ditacademyonline.org\)](http://ditacademyonline.org)

Fire Fatality Investigation Conference
December 9-11, 2024
Las Vegas, Nevada
<https://www.llrmi.com/vegas/>

Suspicious Death Investigations
February 24-25, 2025
Lacombe, LA
<https://ncjtc.fvtc.edu/trainings/TR00007329/TR11895407/suspicious-death-investigations-finding-the-right-eliminating-the-wrong-and-avoiding-the-undeterm>
