

**Office of the Cook County Medical Examiner
Advisory Committee Meeting | October 21, 2016
Office of the Medical Examiner | 2121 W. Harrison Street
Lower Level Conference Room | 11:00am**

Attendance

Present: Dr. Enrique Beckmann, *Medical Profession-Chairman*; Detective Sergeant Jason Moran, *Cook County Sheriff's Office - Vice Chairman*; Susan Dyer, *Funeral Director-Secretary*; Deputy State's Attorney Don Pechous, *Cook County State's Attorney's Office*

Absent: Commissioner Jeffrey R. Tobolski, *Cook County Commissioner 16th District*; Isaac McCoy, *Citizen/Business*; Vuanita Battle-Maze, *Clergy*; Mark A. Rizzo, *Funeral Director*; Deputy Chief Al Nagode, *Chicago Police Department*; Spencer Leak, Jr., *Funeral Director*; Rabbi Moshe Wolf, *Clergy*

Guests Present: Robert Meza, *CCBOA*; Nadine Jakubowski, *Deputy Executive Officer-CCMEO*; Dr. Ponni Arunkumar, *Chief Medical Examiner-CCMEO*; Steven Smith, *Safety Officer-CCMEO*; Rebecca Perrone, *Indigent Coordinator-CCMEO*; Anne Irving, *AFSCME Council 31*; Brian Mahoney, *Toxicologist-CCMEO*; Greg Jenkins, *Toxicologist – CCMEO*; Ian Hammersmith, *Supervising Toxicologist-CCMEO*; Mary McMillan, *Toxicologist-CCMEO*; Norma Hancock, *Toxicologist-CCMEO*; Becky Schlikerman, *Press-CCBOA*; Kevin McNicholas, *CCBOA*; Anthony Putman, *CCMEO*.

Call to Order/Roll Call

MEAC meeting called to order at **11:15 a.m.** by Chairman Beckmann
Secretary Susan Dyer does roll call and announces we DO NOT have a quorum.
Meeting proceeded as informational only.

Approval of Minutes

Minutes are reviewed by committee members present, but there will be no motions accepted due to lack of a quorum – passed until January 2017 meeting.

Public Comment

AFSCME Representative Ann Irving:

The CCBOA is currently reviewing and evaluating the CCMEO Toxicology Laboratory to outsource functions to a private Reference Laboratory in future. The Office went through some very difficult years in the media, the decision to invest in the facility was made at that time. It is the opinion of AFSCME that in reducing this resource, it would be a step backwards and the decision should be discussed at length. The decision to privatize the lab will save money in the budget. Setting the cost saving aside these are some of the reasons to keep the Toxicology Lab in-house:

- 1) Current lab looks at all significant tests on a case by case basis
- 2) Technicians have a broader knowledge of necessary tests, especially in possible opiate overdose cases
- 3) Technicians have understanding of family related issues
- 4) Sensitive cases can be prioritized unlike clinical labs

- 5) Conclusive results are the priority
- 6) Interaction between Doctors and Technicians is of higher quality
- 7) Technicians are available for court testimony
- 8) Protects evidence chain of custody

Brian Mahoney, CCMEO Toxicology Lab:

- 1) Outsourcing lab could present Public Health concern
- 2) We have an obligation to the public
- 3) Private labs are profit driven
- 4) As CCMEO we conduct investigations for Department of Justice and other Law Enforcement
- 5) Public will not have same information
- 6) The public could potentially see artificial results

Chairman Beckmann: Thanks Ann and Brian for their comments and relates that the role of this committee is to be concerned with the dignity of the deceased and to formulate recommendations based on that mandate.

Reports

Chairman Beckmann:

This committee has suffered some attendance issues. Particularly when it comes to Funeral Director Spencer Leak. As a result, Bureau Chief Martha Martinez was contacted to assist. Chief Martinez related that President Preckwinkle and Mr. Leak did communicate. Mr. Leak chose to resign from this Committee with regret. He was unable to make the meetings due to business conflicts. Mr. Leak did wish to relay to the rest of the Committee Members that he was “a very proud participant in making collective decisions in quality and improvements during his service.”

A MEAC member position has been posted on the Cook County website under Board Positions. Mr. Edward Calahan has been contacted to submit application to fill Mr. Leak’s position.

Commissioner Jeffrey Tobolski has not attended any MEAC Meetings thus far. President Preckwinkle will discuss this matter with him directly.

Dr. Arunkumar, CCMEO:

- Today’s cooler count is 156 of which 41 are storage cases
- Next Burial of the Indigent, Unclaimed, and Unidentified is scheduled for November 10th at Mount Olivet Cemetery which will include Unidentified, Fetal, and Unclaimed Cremated Remains
- Candidate for Deputy Chief Medical Examiner
- Openings for Chief of Toxicology, Compliance Officer, and Assistant Medical Examiner
- 3 Forensic Pathology Fellowship positions started in July and are all doing well
- 2017-18 Forensic Pathology Fellowship positions have been filled
- Positions yet to fill: 1 Autopsy Technician, 2 Assistant Medical Examiner, 1 Forensic Compliance Officer
- CCMEO is required to have a Forensic Compliance Officer in order to maintain N.A.M.E. accreditation status.

Unclaimed Veterans Subcommittee (Chairman Susan Dyer and Member Jason Moran):

Vice-Chairman Moran explains progress that has been made by subcommittee working with CCMEO Indigent Coordinator Rebecca Peronne. Rebecca distributes forms to the committee

that have been crafted to implement the new Unclaimed Veteran program. Rebecca explains that Robert Meza has been provided the same forms and has been reviewing them for implementation.

Robert Meza – Forms are currently being reviewed for approval. Funeral Homes are taking responsibility for process, will work as prescribed in that process.

Vice-Chairman Moran recommends strong language to be contained in the 2016 Annual Report regarding the problem with cremating Unclaimed Veterans.

Secretary Dyer – we will recommend utilizing Federal Burial Benefit for all unclaimed/disclaimed US Veterans in CCMEO in the future – no cremation. Also, we have been unable to determine whether there is a backlog of cases at Hines VA Hospital in their cooler (recent media story).

Old/New Business

New - Discussion concerning Toxicology Department

Don Pechous – Dr. Arunkumar was questioned extensively during Budget Hearings concerning outsourcing Toxicology Lab, this is a very busy time of year for BOA and the potential layoffs of those employees are being discussed by Commissioners.

Chairman Beckmann – Positive impact on Toxicology Department in terms of service to public, turnaround time is currently 90 days. Outsourcing to a reference lab will improve efficiency, service will not be affected, and turnaround time will be 2 weeks. The retention of a Chief Toxicologist for future might be appropriate.

Vice-Chairman Moran – From a Law Enforcement perspective, one of the last main deficiencies for the CCMEO is the length of time it takes to obtain toxicology results. This affects the dignity of the deceased along with public health. An example of this is heroine/fentanyl epidemic.

Dr. Arunkumar – With the difficulty in filling the Chief Toxicology position, the rationale to outsource makes sense to the Commissioners in terms of the budget.

Adjournment

Informational Meeting concluded at 12:10 PM