

Kent County Medical Examiner 1998 Annual Report

Douglas A. Mack, M.D., M.P.H., Kent County Chief Medical Examiner

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Office of the Kent County Medical Examiner

To the Kent County Board of Commissioners,
and to the Citizens of Kent County:

The responsibility of determining the cause and manner of unexpected deaths in Kent County is one that the Medical Examiner staff takes very seriously. The results of these investigations provide valuable information which is used by public health personnel, the criminal justice system, families of the deceased, and other concerned parties.

While many regard the Medical Examiner Program as being primarily concerned with the circumstances surrounding the end of life, Medical Examiners are equally concerned with the preservation of life. In 1998, Medical Examiner personnel continued to spend many hours with the Child Death Review Team to examine all types of data related to the deaths of children under 18 years of age in our community. In addition, Medical Examiner office staff began participating in the Michigan Medical Examiner Database, a statewide Internet-based system designed to collect enhanced medical examiner data. As this database is populated, it will provide us with new data and insights about unexplained death and death investigation in our state and region.

In closing, I would like to thank the Kent County Board of Commissioners for their continued support of this program which enables the Medical Examiner staff to provide this valuable and necessary service for the citizens of Kent County. It is my pleasure to present the Kent County Medical Examiner's 1998 Annual Report.

Sincerely,



Douglas A. Mack, M.D., M.P.H.
Chief Medical Examiner

Medical Examiner Program Expenditures

1998 Expenditures

	Amount	Percentage
Medical Examiner (compensation)	\$132,854	18.8%
Autopsies	456,315	64.5%
Cadaver transportation	43,934	6.2%
Support services	40,740	5.8%
Administration	33,100	4.7%
Total	\$706,943	100.0%

Kent County Medical Examiner Program Personnel

Douglas A. Mack, M.D., M.P.H.
Chief Medical Examiner

John T. Connolly
Medical Examiner Investigator

Stephen D. Cohle, M.D.
Deputy Chief Medical Examiner

Paul R. Davison
Medical Examiner Investigator

Joyce de Jong, D.O.
Deputy Medical Examiner

Martha J. Scholl
Medical Examiner Investigator

Ramon B. Lang, M.D.
Deputy Medical Examiner

Richard Washburn
Medical Examiner Scene Investigator

Larry J. Stalsonburg, D.O.
Deputy Medical Examiner

Camilla M. Fulvi
Administrative Assistant

David A. Start, M.D.
Deputy Medical Examiner

Carmen Perez
Medical Transcriptionist

1998 Medical Examiner Program Highlights

Medical Examiner office staff are participating in the Michigan Medical Examiner Database, a statewide Internet-based system designed to collect enhanced medical examiner data. The intent of the program is to standardize the collection of data surrounding unexplained deaths and improve the Medical Examiner's ability to report on program activity. The Kent County Medical Examiner program has been voluntarily populating this database since September 1998, and will be able to generate next year's annual report from the database.

Kent County Medical Examiners and Medical Examiner Investigators have increased efforts to conduct death scene investigations to complement medical and pathological procedures. Death scene investigation can provide important clues in determining cause and manner of death, and is recommended in the *National Guidelines for Death Investigation* issues by the U.S. Department of Justice. Medical Examiner program staff conducted 456 death scene investigations in 1998.

Deputy Medical Examiner Joyce de Jong, D.O., departed in September 1998 to participate in a one-year forensic pathology fellowship through Emory University and the Fulton County Medical Examiner in Atlanta, Georgia.

Kent County Medical Examiners and Investigators continued to give many presentations and classes about the function of the Medical Examiner Program and death investigation, presenting lectures to local law enforcement agencies and schools throughout the year.

The Medical Examiner System: Reportable Deaths and Autopsy

The Michigan County Medical Examiners Law, P.A. 181 of 1953, as amended, and the Michigan Public Health Code, P.A. 368 of 1978, as amended, mandates that specific types of deaths (listed below, left) be referred to the Medical Examiner for investigation. Medical Examiner investigation of a death may also be ordered by the prosecuting attorney, the attorney general, or upon the filing of a petition signed by six (6) electors of a county. Not all deaths referred to the Medical Examiner for investigation necessarily result in autopsy, however, autopsy is generally ordered in certain types of cases (listed below, right).

Types of Deaths Reportable to the Medical Examiner, P.A. 368 of 1978

1. Sudden deaths and unexpected deaths (all deaths occurring in operating room, in recovery room, anesthesia-related, natural death but not expected, occupational related death, etc.)*
2. Accidental deaths (motor vehicle, burns, drowning, drug overdose, drug toxicity, etc.)*
3. Violent deaths (i.e. homicide, gunshot, stabbing)*
4. Suspicious circumstances surrounding a death.*
5. Death of a mother due to an abortion.
6. Death of a prisoner in any county or city jail who dies while so imprisoned.
7. Fetal death occurring without medical attendance at or after the delivery.

In terms of physician attendance in these matters for the purpose of the Medical Examiner program, we consider that an investigation is required when:

- A. The deceased was last seen by a physician more than ten (10)** days before his or her death, if the cause of death appears to be other than the illness or condition for which the deceased was being treated.
- B. The attending physician cannot accurately determine the cause of death.
- C. When the deceased has not received any medical attendance during the 48 hours*** prior to the hour of death and the attending physician is unable to accurately determine the cause of death.

* All trauma-related deaths regardless of when trauma occurred.

** The ten (10) day requirement relates solely to physician attendance.

*** The 48 hour requirement triggers an investigation when there has been no medical attendance of any kind.

Types of Medical Examiner Cases for which Autopsy is Generally Ordered

1. Sudden deaths and unexpected deaths only when, in the Medical Examiner's judgement, sufficient medical history is not available to determine cause of death.
2. Accidental deaths (motor vehicle, burns, drowning, drug overdose, drug toxicity, etc.) If an individual has been hospitalized for a prolonged time, it is the Medical Examiner's decision to order an autopsy.
3. Violent deaths (homicide, suicide, gunshot, etc.)
4. Suspicious circumstances surrounding death, including unidentified bodies.
5. Death of a mother due to an abortion.
6. All sudden infant deaths (SIDS).
7. Death of a prisoner in any county or city jail who dies while so imprisoned.
8. In a fetal death occurring without medical attendance at or after delivery.
9. An autopsy may be ordered at the discretion of the Medical Examiner when death occurs more than ten days after the deceased was last seen by a physician, if the cause of death appears to be other than the illness or condition for which the deceased was being treated.
10. Death for which the attending physician cannot accurately determine the cause.
11. Anesthesia-related and unexpected deaths of patients in health care institutions.
12. Work-related deaths or deaths which occur in the workplace.

1998 Medical Examiner Case and Autopsy Statistics

Reporting period: January 1, 1998 through December 31, 1998

1998 Medical Examiner Autopsies (Table 1)

	Number	Percentage
Autopsies Ordered by Medical Examiner	374	92.1%
Autopsies Ordered by Others	32	7.9%
Total Autopsies in 1998	406	100.0%

(Total Kent County Medical Examiner Cases, 1998: 1,053)

1998 Medical Examiner Autopsies by Month (Table 2)

Medical Examiner	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
S. Cohle, M.D.	2	2	1	1	2	0	1	1	3	0	2	0	15
J. Connolly	3	5	8	6	5	8	1	7	6	5	7	3	64
R. Lang, M.D.	1	4	2	5	7	7	6	3	3	4	1	3	46
L. Stalsonburg, D.O.	1	1	4	0	4	4	1	5	4	2	1	3	30
P. Davison	5	5	10	6	7	2	13	7	4	7	6	14	86
J. de Jong, M.D.	2	7	2	1	1	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	21
M. Scholl	3	6	8	4	2	10	3	3	5	5	7	5	61
D. Start, M.D.	3	2	1	3	4	7	2	3	7	4	5	10	51
Total Autopsies	20	32	36	26	32	41	32	29	32	27	29	38	374

1998 Medical Examiner Cases by Month, with Percentage Autopsied (Table 3)

Medical Examiner	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total	% Autopsy
S. Cohle, M.D.	4	3	4	3	2	4	2	2	6	4	3	3	40	38%
J. Connolly	18	14	14	17	12	22	10	16	14	14	20	15	186	34%
R. Lang, M.D.	13	23	15	20	17	25	21	11	10	20	10	21	206	22%
L. Stalsonburg, D.O.	5	4	6	2	6	6	3	8	5	5	4	4	58	52%
P. Davison	18	15	21	19	18	14	24	12	15	17	23	24	220	39%
J. de Jong, M.D.	3	13	6	3	3	7	9	1	1	0	0	0	46	46%
M. Scholl	10	11	15	12	13	16	11	13	8	16	16	12	153	40%
D. Start, M.D.	9	8	11	12	11	12	9	14	21	11	12	14	144	35%
Total Cases	80	91	92	88	82	106	89	77	80	87	88	93	1053	36%

1998 Medical Examiner Mortality Statistics¹

Reporting period: January 1, 1998 through December 31, 1998

Manner of Death (Table 4)

	Number	Percentage*
Natural	741	70.4%
Accident	217	20.6%
Homicide	35	3.3%
Suicide	50	4.8%
Indeterminate	9	0.9%
Pending	1	0.1%
Total	1,053	100.0%

* Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding

** Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

*** Deaths caused by occupational accidents, falls, house fires, etc.

Cause of Death (Table 5)

	Number	Percentage*
Natural	725	68.9%
SIDS**	15	1.4%
Auto	114	10.8%
Gun	43	4.1%
Stabbing	6	0.6%
Hanging	7	0.7%
Drowning	10	1.0%
Drug Overdose	21	2.0%
Poisoning	9	0.9%
Other***	102	9.7%
Total	1,052	100.0%

Suicide Deaths: Methods Used by Age of Deceased (Table 6)

	Gun	Poisoning	Drug O.D.	Hanging	Other	Total
Under 1	0	0	0	0	0	0
1 - 19	3	0	0	1	0	4
20 - 44	13	3	3	6	5	30
45 - 64	4	4	1	0	1	10
65+	3	1	2	0	0	6
Total	23	8	6	7	6	50

¹ Statistics on this page reflect deaths investigated by the Medical Examiner, not all Kent County deaths.

1998 Medical Examiner Demographic Statistics

Reporting period: January 1, 1998 through December 31, 1998

Sex of Deceased (Table 7)

	Number	Percentage*
Male	611	58.0%
Female	436	41.4%
Undetermined	6	0.6%
Total	1,053	100.0%

Ethnicity of Deceased (Table 9)

	Number	Percentage*
African American	114	10.8%
Caucasian	893	84.8%
American Indian	6	0.6%
Hispanic	24	2.3%
Other	10	1.0%
Unknown	6	0.6%
Total	1,053	100.0%

Age at Death (Table 8)

	Number	Percentage*
Under 1	36	3.4%
1 - 5	13	1.2%
6 - 16	16	1.5%
17 - 25	60	5.7%
26 - 44	133	12.6%
45 - 64	233	22.1%
65+	562	53.4%
Total	1,053	100.0%

* Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding error.

** The Medical Examiner may be unable to determine the sex of the deceased in cases where only partial remains are found, partial skeletal remains, or under other similar circumstances.

Longitudinal Kent County Medical Examiner Record

Reporting period: January 1, 1994 through December 31, 1998

Manner of Death (Table 10)

	<u>1994</u>		<u>1995</u>		<u>1996</u>		<u>1997</u>		<u>1998</u>	
	Cases	Autopsy	Cases	Autopsy	Cases	Autopsy	Cases	Autopsy	Cases	Autopsy
Natural	885	199	817	185	748	164	771	190	741	171
Accident	198	133	205	109	192	113	199	99	217	120
Homicide*	36	34	37	37	30	29	35	33	35	31
Suicide*	60	54	61	56	55	52	60	56	50	48
Undetermined*	13	12	10	8	9	7	4	4	9	3
Pending	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total	1,194	434	1,130	395	1,034	365	1,068	382	1,053	374

* Discrepancies between the number of cases of a particular type of death (homicide, suicide, undetermined) and the number of autopsies reflect autopsies ordered by another county or done privately.

Cause of Death (Table 11)

	<u>1994</u>		<u>1995</u>		<u>1996</u>		<u>1997</u>		<u>1998</u>	
	Cases	Autopsy	Cases	Autopsy	Cases	Autopsy	Cases	Autopsy	Cases	Autopsy
Natural	875	189	802	173	738	155	763	180	725	156
SIDS	12	12	13	12	7	6	7	7	15	14
Auto	117	89	106	60	109	71	103	59	114	60
Gun	57	50	45	42	41	36	48	48	43	40
Stabbing	3	3	4	4	5	5	4	4	6	6
Hanging	11	11	17	16	14	14	7	7	7	7
Drowning	13	9	2	1	7	3	12	7	10	4
Drug Overdose	17	16	18	16	15	15	23	17	21	21
Poison	11	11	7	6	17	17	15	14	9	8
Other	76	42	116	65	81	43	87	39	102	57
Total	1,192	432	1,130	395	1,034	365	1,069	382	1,052	373

Age at Death (Table 12)

	<u>1994</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1997</u>	<u>1998</u>
Under 1	26	27	22	20	36
1 - 5	17	16	12	13	13
6 - 16	31	21	21	17	16
17 - 25	78	67	49	55	60
26 - 44	144	139	129	125	133
45 - 64	271	231	236	243	233
65+	627	629	565	596	562
Total	1,194	1,130	1,034	1,069	1,053

Notes on this PDF publication:

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