

**Office of the Cook County Medical Examiner
Advisory Committee Meeting | March 21, 2014 | REVISED**
Medical Examiner's Office | Lower Level Conference Room
11:00AM**

I. Attendance

Present: *Reverend Vuanita Battle-Maze, Vitas Hospice; Dr. Enrique Beckmann, Chairman, ME Advisory Committee; Susan J. Dyer, Funeral Director; Commissioner Elizabeth Ann Gorman, Cook County Commissioner; Spencer Leak Jr., Leak & Sons funeral Home; Isaac McCoy, President/CEO Urban Mosaic; Detective Jason Moran, Cook County Sheriff's Office, Vice Chairman, ME Advisory Committee; Mark A. Rizzo, I.D.F.P.R, Secretary, ME Advisory Committee; Commander Eugene Roy, Chicago Police Department; Rabbi Moshe Wolf, Police Chaplain, CPD/CFD; Daniel Gallagher, Office of the State's Attorney; Dr. Stephen Cina, Chief Medical Examiner of Cook County; Martha Martinez, CCBOA; James Sledge, CCME Executive Officer; Octavius Jones, CCME; Robert Meza, CCBOA; Frank Shuftan, BOA; Mary Marik, CCME; Anel Ruiz, Office of the President; George Marin, CCME; Consuelo Alvarez, CCME*

Absent: *Nadine Jakubowski, Deputy Executive Officer; Kevin McNicholas, CCBOA; Dr. Ponni Arunkumar, Deputy Chief Medical Examiner of Cook County;*

II. Call to Order/Introductions

Roll Call

Dr. Beckmann calls meeting to order at 11:04 a.m.

C. Alvarez takes attendance, announces there is a quorum

Move to move the Chairman's report to the end of the agenda for today's meeting – M. Rizzo

Agreed and seconded – E. Beckmann

All members present agree - Committee Members

Introductions – Dr. Beckmann

We welcome Dan Gallagher of the Cook County State's Attorney's Office who is taking the place of Patrick Driscoll on this committee going forward – E. Beckmann

Welcome to our 2 guests from Gift of Hope – Shaun Martin and Karen Cameron – E. Beckmann

III. Approval of Minutes

Call for motion to approve minutes of January 17, 2014

Minutes of January 17, 2014 –

Please amend and annual report Section IV., B. – Remove “Will amend Annual Report”

Regarding motion to accept Annual Report in Section IV., C please amend to read Motion passed “Unanimously”

Call to accept minutes of January 17, 2014 with amendments – E. Beckmann

Motion to accept minutes – M. Wolf

Motion seconded – J. Moran

Unanimous Approval of minutes of January 17, 2014 with amendments

IV. Old Business

A. Cremation Permits fees/collection issue – R. Meza

- RFP said \$150 – Contractor has to give \$50 back for cremation permit – is it possible to waive cremation fee and just pay the contractor \$100 – it seems precarious to pay a contractor \$150 and require the contractor to give back \$50 – J. Moran
Fair amount of discussion – Issue moot
According to county code, the granting of cremation permits is with CCME – CCME can keep the fee
Vendor is paying us a fee – this can be waived – M. Rizzo
To comply with RFP, crematorium has to pay a fee to CCME
This not the purview of this committee only what the resolution is – E. Beckmann
Not resolved – R. Meza
We are charging \$50 cremation fee – Resolved per Dr. Cina – No further discussion

V. Reports From

A. Chairperson – E. Beckmann – Report from chairman moved to end of minutes

Would like to remind committee that the mandate of MEAC is to protect the dignity of decedents – Discussions should focus around this, with this committee – Please bear this in mind

This committee would like to congratulate the CCME office for obtaining provisional accreditation from N.A.M.E.

B. Bureau of Administration – M. Martinez

- We are officially into budget preparation season
Business cases – due 4/4/14 – will be passed to budget on 4/11/14. This refers to the justification to be submitted to the CC Board of Commissioners for approval of proposed expenditures. The projects proposed by the CCMEO include:
Cost saving measures
New initiatives
Capital request due by the end of April

C. CCME – S. Cina

- I would like to introduce James Sledge our new Executive Officer – S. Cina
Previously a practicing lawyer – 15 or so years as an administrator – worked for Cook County, The City of Chicago and the State of Illinois – S. Cina
I am glad to assist with the strategic vision of the Medical Examiner’s Office – J. Sledge

We welcome Mr. Sledge and look forward to working with you – E. Beckmann

- NAME inspection was at the end of January – We received provisional accreditation – We are working actively to eliminate deficiencies
- New Chief Toxicologist
- Three and a half years from now we will have full NAME accreditation – This has truly been a team effort – we have had much support
Dr. Arunkumar
Roy Dames
Octavius Jones
Downtown Support as well
MEAC helped by adding advice and credibility

President Toni Preckwinkle was here for a general staff meeting – New cooler renovation coincided with NAME provisional accreditation

- We will be tweaking 3-5 year business plan – We may want to look at getting a footprint for updates and expansion – need to be near hospitals – Intermediate to long range plan for the CCME office – Physical life of an ME office is 25 – 30 years we are at 35 years.

Plans will need to be approved by commissioners

All improvements of cooler are portable – updates – updated technology – CT scanning – business plan for portable CT scanner – Non portable CT Scanner cost too much with lead room that is needed

We are going to be the best office in the country

Dr. Cina really did a great job – M. Wolf

D. Subcommittee Reports

Are there any items from subcommittees? – E. Beckmann

- Cremation Policy Subcommittee – Chairman J. Moran, M. Rizzo, and S. Dyer

All going smoothly so far – main goal is to keep information flow going so there are no issues with cremations. We have been working hard with Dr. Cina to make sure issues don't arise – A lot of support right now doing well – J. Moran

The sub-committee's main concerns as it pertains to cremation is the following...

- 1.) that all decedents are identified by competent authority
- 2.) that proper notification is made to the lawful next of kin and documented
- 3.) that proper heir ship is established and documented
- 4.) that chain of custody of each decedent is documented

The Focus of this Medical Examiner's Advisory Board should shift back from dealing with operational issues which are the purview of the Medical Examiner and focus on the issue of the dignity of the deceased which is its mandate - E. Beckmann

I am just as concerned with issues surrounding the dignity of the deceased, but not just theoretically. The operational issues at the office directly impact the dignity of the deceased and we need to be aware of the practices here so we know how they affect that dignity. In other words, dignity and operations can be one in the same – J. Moran

After implementation of cremation policy and with better functioning of the ME, there will not be a need for indigent burials at Mt Olivet. They have fulfilled their commitment.

The policy regarding who gets buried and who gets cremated is unclear and should be replaced by a flow chart. This policy should be reviewed by the Advisory Committee to ensure that it is consistent with protecting the dignity of the deceased.

How will it be decided – Burial or Cremation – Not discriminating on who is buried, who is cremated?

We must review policy in order to anticipate and prevent issues in the future
Prior to finalizing the policy the ME's Office cremated 5 bodies
Vendors chosen

Note: the following list should be replaced by a flow chart provided by the ME

Family requests		Family Requests		
Storage cases	}	Unidentified	and	Babies
Disclaimed		Unclaimed		

With new system the checklist will be easier – will not be such a long process
and relatives will sign affidavit of Next Of Kin

The current cooler census is 183 with a capacity of 250 – The census is 60 to 70 bodies higher than optimal – Burials hopefully will start up again in April

Could we remind MEAC of cremation rationale –
Saving \$380 /case
Dignified
When unable to bury in cold months, we cremate

In Catholic and Jewish faiths stigma about cremation has gone away somewhat and are allowed in both places – J. Moran

How do we establish what the will of the deceased is? – E. Beckmann

We don't establish what the will of the deceased is – S. Cina

If we don't ask the question how do we know? Did it go along with the decedent's life pattern, beliefs, and wishes? – E. Beckmann

I am totally against the cremation process – I don't want to see cremations because of lack of funds – Most families I encounter only cremate due to no funds – we then try to work out a burial to assist families – I do not want to be on record voting for cremation – S. Leak

I have spoken to families - Some that want cremation want to know why we don't cremate – We do want to take families' wishes into consideration – O. Jones

I have no problem asking the question – S. Cina

If the decedent or his next of kin have no economic means, the decision is taken away
If that is the case, we may be going against the decedent's will thus violating the decedent's dignity since respecting an individual's wishes is an essential element of respecting their dignity – E. Beckmann

Families opt out of burial sometimes because they may not be able to afford – V. Battle-Maze

Responsibility then goes to taxpayer – Can families oblige government to provide the final disposition of their choosing no matter the cost to the taxpayer – is that fiscally responsible? – J. Moran

Can families make requests to bury or cremate? And are we obligated to grant the request?
We are charged to preserve the dignity of the deceased. We have an obligation to the county tax payers as well - J. Moran

The Advisory Committee has a very narrow responsibility, which is to protect the dignity of the deceased. The Committee has no mandate regarding the financial implications to the taxpayers. That is something for the Board of Commissioners to concern themselves with - E. Beckmann

I disagree, please read our by-laws – Article 1 Section 1 states verbatim, “The purpose of the Cook County Medical Examiner’s Advisory Committee is to make recommendations to the Cook County Board of Commissioners for improving *operations* of the Office of the Cook County Medical Examiner’s Office and *service to the residents of Cook County*”. In Article 2 Section 4 of our bi-laws is the first mention of “dignity”. So to say that we have a very narrow responsibility of protecting the dignity of the deceased or to imply that is all we are here to do is inconsistent with our own by-laws – J. Moran

Cremation rate for Midwest is 40%; CA is 60%; Illinois is 28% - M. Rizzo

Families come in to funeral home they often choose the more cost effective way –
Burial, above or in ground
Cremation, Fire or Chemical (Chemical More expensive)
Donation to science – M. Rizzo

Policy and procedure is in place – CCME took to the board, wrote and came up with policy

For the last several months we advised Dr. Cina what we wanted – he has gone to family to give them choice of Catholic cemetery, Mt. Olivet or Homewood
The Policy regarding cremation as it currently exists has nothing to do with the wishes of the decedent. This is concerning because of the irrevocable nature of cremation.

This is not in policy – asking what they want – We are asking question but, to the ME, according to this policy it is irrelevant what the family wants

Is an advocate allowed to make decisions for what decedent wanted – CCME has remains on premises – they ask family what did this person want?- M. Rizzo

If decedent's wishes are unknown is it still not dignified? – J. Moran

We are taking a positive but an aggressive action toward decedent. Cremation is more invasive than burial. The Policy's default option is cremation regardless of the wishes of the deceased or family. – E. Beckmann

What does NAME say? – E. Roy

NAME doesn't address this – it is according to each office to decide – S. Cina

We each have our own religious opinions and views, so we are not to make any pronouncements about which mode of disposition is more or less dignified. But it is essential to consider the wishes of the deceased in order to protect their dignity – the point is what did the deceased want? What does family want, not what can they afford – E. Beckmann

Point of Board is to support CCME to do proper vetting with process – Dr. Cina can choose according to policy to do what is proposed in the cremation policy, he can decide on disposition of body – M Rizzo

Our role is purely advisory – we have gone beyond almost to directing Dr. Cina on what to do The policy is not consistent with MEAC role of keeping the dignity of decedents

All we are attempting to do is advise

Time and focus on protecting dignity of decedent has not been spent in vain

The subcommittee has more to review and then we will make a recommendation to the committee. At that point, we will make symbolic vote to approve policy or not - J. Moran

Can we relook at the policy and suggest modifications to policy to reflect consideration of the wishes of the deceased? – E. Beckmann

- Mt. Olivet and Burials

Had a conversation with Catholic cemeteries – Press conference led them to believe that there are no more overcrowding issues

The pledge to donate 300 graves was a 1 time burial to eliminate the “back log” of bodies – don't want to see bodies stacked up – Offer was changed 9 or 10 burials until we fulfill the 300 – J. Moran

Homewood Cemetery - to have a vendor not fulfill their obligations to bury during winter is unacceptable, the deceased are being buried at cemeteries all over the county right now – J. Moran

We would like to make motion to table discussion to next meeting – In fairness we have 2 reps from Gift of Hope – Can they be heard please?

E. Gift of Hope

The purpose of inviting Gift of Hope is to ensure that families are informed in sufficient details about what is to be done to the deceased during procurement. The physically very invasive nature of harvesting bones in particular raises questions about whether the dignity of the deceased is properly accounted for. Since Gift of Hope relies on ME to provide bodies, it is necessary for this Committee to understand in detail how the family is being informed

We are a federally designated non for profit organization in the state of Illinois

We are the forensic liaison to this office – Interaction with families – Discussion with families – find out their expectations

We talk about organ donations, tissue donations with families in detail so when they see their loved ones again they know what to expect

The focus is “can we help other people with this donation – You are familiar with registry – we have the same discussion with families – this discussion, the registry is viewed as a contract with Gift of Hope

5.2 million registered in Illinois – You have to actually sign up to agree to be a donor

People don’t want to talk about their own death that is why we have to deal with families at time of death

Do you get donations from bodies under the CCME Office – E. Beckmann

Hospitals call us usually 1st – We then come (to CCME office) after speaking with families, to do removals

What comes 1st in criminal cases? – J. Moran

Depends on the case – S. Cina

Doctor is contacted – GOH gets permission on what they can take and not take

Go thru your relationship with deceased

- verify who you should be talking to – anyone else that can make this decision – would you be interested in donating a bone from arm? We tell them that something will be put in place of the bone for viewing – Based on the conversation we find out how decedent will be dressed and what will final disposition be of body

They are told specifically lower extremity bone, soft tissue, etc. – We are being transparent with families – we do not specify incisions

I understand, when you are talking to families you try to protect them by not using graphic language – J. Moran

Timing of call is somewhat poor but timing of donation is important – V. Battle Maze
They do participate in training seminars

VI. Adjournment

Motion called to adjourn meeting – M. Rizzo

Second the motion – I. McCoy

Committee votes in favor of adjourning

Motion carries – Meeting adjourned at 1:00 p.m.

Next Meeting- Scheduled for May 16th, 2014