

Access to Facility

Created 11/17/2010
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Purpose

To outline the safety and security of the facility, and identify what persons are allowed to view a procedure or tour the facility of the coroner's office.

Policy

The [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] has a statutory responsibility to perform autopsies in certain sudden or unexplained deaths. These procedures are the practice of medicine and are performed following established forensic protocols to collect evidence and document the effects of trauma or disease processes on the human body. [REDACTED] is one of the agencies in the state that can provide educational opportunities that include anatomic viewing prior to embalming, the viewing of the effects of trauma on tissue and bones, evaluating the effects of certain rescue attempts and procedures, and to observe a legal method of evidence collection and preservation.

As one of the potential providers of these educational opportunities, the [REDACTED] has long operated under a policy that permits access to autopsy procedures by professional, paraprofessional and other special interest groups. The [REDACTED] recognizes the learning opportunities for those professionals requesting the forensic overview of the Coroner's Office. Further, the [REDACTED] recognizes the limitations of the forensic autopsy as an anatomy instruction experience. These two elements will be applied to all requests to view an autopsy. Other factors to be applied to all requests to view an [REDACTED] autopsy will be available resources of the [REDACTED] health and safety considerations, scheduling, and space availability. The stated purposes of the requesting group will also be considered.

Procedures

FACILITY SAFETY

The [REDACTED] is a secured facility where an individual must have the appropriate access privileges associated with their county issued identification card to be able to navigate the

[REDACTED]

building. All full-time coroner staff members have access to all sections of the office at any hour, whereas outside support staff, such as sheriff's office personnel, contracted transportation company personnel, or [REDACTED] cleaning and maintenance staff, have limited access to sections of the coroner facility during designated hours. If in the event of an emergency, if an outside official must enter the coroner facility after hours or on the weekends it must be done so using the access card located in the [REDACTED] Emergency Communications Center by a sheriff's office official with the rank of Sergeant or higher.

The [REDACTED] facility has multiple sections, which include but are not limited to the body receiving garage, coolers and freezers, autopsy suites, evidence and property storage, toxicology room, histology laboratory, office space and records storage. Each section requires the use of a county issued identification card with the appropriate access privileges to gain entry.

REQUESTS TO VIEW AUTOPSY

Personnel with investigative responsibilities in a case will be allowed to view autopsies, including those involved with investigating law enforcement agencies and crime laboratories, district attorneys, or retained/assigned public defenders. Crime laboratory and law enforcement personnel will be allowed to obtain their own photographs during the examination; no audio or video recordings of autopsy procedures are allowed. Treating medical personnel or first responders are also permitted to attend and view autopsies.

All requests to view an autopsy for educational/teaching purposes may be made in writing to the Coroner or Office Administrator, via letter ([REDACTED] 13101 East Broncos Parkway, Centennial, CO 80112-4558) or e-mail ([REDACTED]). Groups requesting recurring or repeat visits may be scheduled via phone. Scheduled groups or individuals will not be allowed to view autopsies on suspicious deaths/homicide victims or on potentially infectious decedents, and groups may require rescheduling with little notice based on the case types and autopsy load of a particular day.

Information from the spokesperson of the group must include the identity of the group, and is to enumerate the academic standing, professional affiliation, the specific reason the viewing experience is desired, the number of individuals within the group, suggested date or dates, and the phone number of the contact person. (This procedure does not apply to individuals involved in a particular case who request to follow the case because of police or medical affiliation.) These requests are evaluated by the Coroner or Forensic Pathologist from the standpoint of educational significance as well as medicolegal requirements of the specific profession.

The requests will be evaluated based on the overall learning experience from the medicolegal standpoint. Individuals or groups better served by other science experiences will be directed to such resources, where possible.

Not all requests to observe an autopsy will be granted. However, in such cases, these individuals may be provided with other kinds of training information about the [REDACTED]

EXCEPTIONS TO THE GENERAL REQUIREMENTS:

- Medical Students
- Pathology Residents
- College Students accepted for [REDACTED] Internship
- EMT Academy

- Physician Request

VIDEO IN LIEU OF AUTOPSY VIEW: In those cases where permission to view an autopsy cannot be granted, a video presentation may be offered to the group. This presentation can be a general jurisdiction talk, or may be a specific presentation about the forensic autopsy that has been developed for such purposes.

CRITERIA FOR VIEWING AN AUTOPSY

SCHEDULING: Individuals or groups approved for the viewing experience will be advised of their responsibilities in advance of the scheduled date. Individuals or groups provided with specific viewing dates will also be advised that they may be canceled with little prior notice based on lack of appropriate cases, presence of a sensitive case, or needs of other medicolegal professionals.

All viewing experiences will be scheduled weekdays only, excluding holidays. All scheduled individuals should arrive at the [REDACTED] at a predetermined time, at least 30 minutes prior to the scheduled autopsy start time. Entry is only by the main door.

GENERAL VIEWING POLICY: Each individual will be required to be logged on the case forms for the autopsies being viewed. In addition, all individuals viewing an autopsy will be required to sign an Autopsy Viewing sheet that relates to the confidentiality of the information accessed. Guidelines established by the [REDACTED] require that autopsy viewers wear appropriate attire. They will be required to don all attire or personal protective equipment as described in the current [REDACTED] Health and Safety written policy and procedures developed in compliance with OSHA requirements. The procedure designates the autopsy suite as "contaminated" and all individuals accessing must be in appropriate protective clothing and gear. Individuals who have access to such materials are encouraged to bring them in order to help defray associated costs.

Cellular phones or other audio/video recording devices are not allowed in the autopsy suite; the taking of photographs or audio or video recording is strictly prohibited.

AUTOPSY SUITE ETIQUETTE: The staff member responsible for the particular group observing an autopsy will be responsible for introducing the members of the group to the autopsy pathologist as well as the autopsy assistants. The staff member providing the tour will be responsible for explaining all health and safety requirements that prevail within the [REDACTED] facility, particularly in the autopsy suite.

The autopsy assistants have primary responsibility for managing all outside individuals within the autopsy suite area. Observers should have been provided with background on the [REDACTED] and why certain procedures are to be performed. Individuals responsible for setting up the autopsy observation shall assure that the viewer has some awareness of the procedure. The incisions should be described beforehand and an explanation offered about the noises and odors, and that the observation is while standing in an often crowded room.

IDENTIFICATION: Any staff member should feel free to query an unknown individual present in the autopsy suite as to their identity.

TOURS

All tours should be coordinated through the office administration primarily to avoid schedule conflicts. Tours are held for a variety of reasons, and can be general one-on-one or very specifically geared to a particular small group. Tours do not necessarily include entry into the autopsy suite. Also, tours will not include lingering in the receiving area. Both the autopsy suite and the receiving area are considered "contaminated" areas

[REDACTED]

of the [REDACTED] and access will require protective attire when autopsies are being performed. Anyone conducting a tour should be sure to tell staff members in advance if that work area is to be included on the tour. Routes for the tour may vary and can include areas such as the general office area, the records room, meeting facilities, main autopsy, receiving/releasing and histology.

Policy/Procedure Violations

Violations of this policy are grounds for disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

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Approved by:

[REDACTED]