

# REGIONAL FORENSIC SCIENCE CENTER SEDGWICK COUNTY, KANSAS



Timothy P. Rohrig, Ph.D. — Director  
Jaime L. Oeberst, M.D. — District Coroner-Chief Medical Examiner  
Shari L. Beck — Forensic Administrator/Chief Medical Investigator

## FORENSIC PATHOLOGY DIVISION 2007 ANNUAL REPORT

### HISTORY/OVERVIEW

The Regional Forensic Science Center officially opened on December 21<sup>st</sup>, 1995. The Center houses the Pathology Division (including the Office of the District Coroner) and the Forensic Science Laboratories. The Pathology Division is organized into three sections: Pathology Administration, Medical Investigations and the Autopsy Service.

As mandated by law, the Pathology/Coroner Division has the responsibility for investigating deaths within Sedgwick County that are a result of violence, unlawful means, suddenly when in apparent health, not regularly attended by a physician, any suspicious or unusual manner, when in police custody, or when the determination of the cause of death is held to be in the public interest. The primary goal of investigation and the postmortem examination is to determine cause and manner of death in order to generate a death certificate.

Cause of death is the injury or disease that results in death. Manner of death is determined by circumstances in which the death occurred and includes natural, accident, homicide, suicide, and undetermined. Undetermined manner of death is used when circumstances are unknown or are unclear.

Since 1996, the Pathology Division has seen a steady increase in the number of cases reported to the office and the number of postmortem examinations performed, with almost a two-fold increase in both reported cases and examinations.

### PATHOLOGY LEADERSHIP

#### **District Coroner-Chief Medical Examiner**

*Jaime L. Oeberst, M.D.*

#### **Chief Medical Investigator**

*Shari L. Beck, F-ABMDI*

#### **Chief Pathology Assistant**

*Patricia Bird*



**SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENTS**

Angela Benefiel, Medical Investigator, was a course instructor for Sudden Unexplained Infant Death Investigation: Guidelines for the Scene Investigator at Friends University , Wichita, Kansas, September 14, 2007.

Jaime L. Oeberst, M.D., District Corner/Chief Medical Examiner, has been an appointed member of the State Death Review Board since 2001.

The Pathology Division was re-accredited by the National Association of Medical Examiners in 2006, with the initial accreditation in 2001.

**COUNTIES SERVED**

In 2007, the Pathology Division provided service to Sedgwick County and 34 other counties in the state of Kansas [Figure 1].

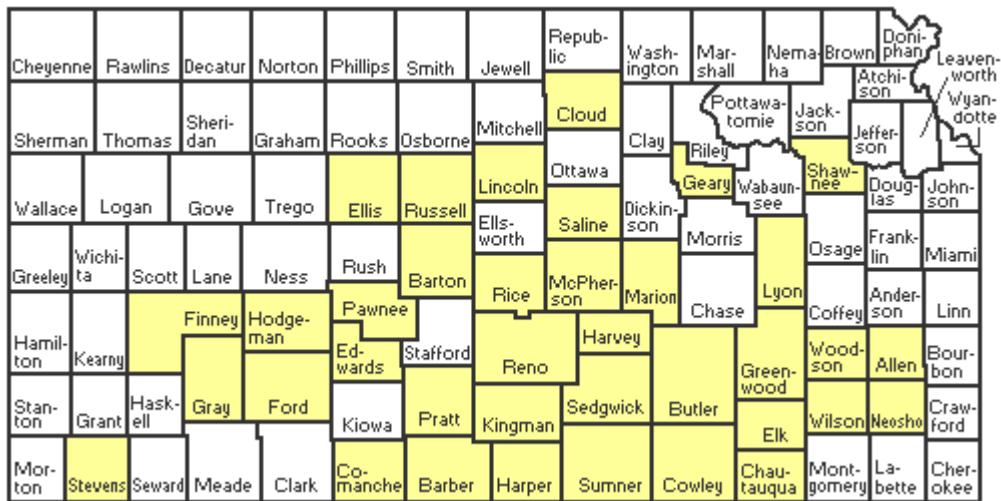
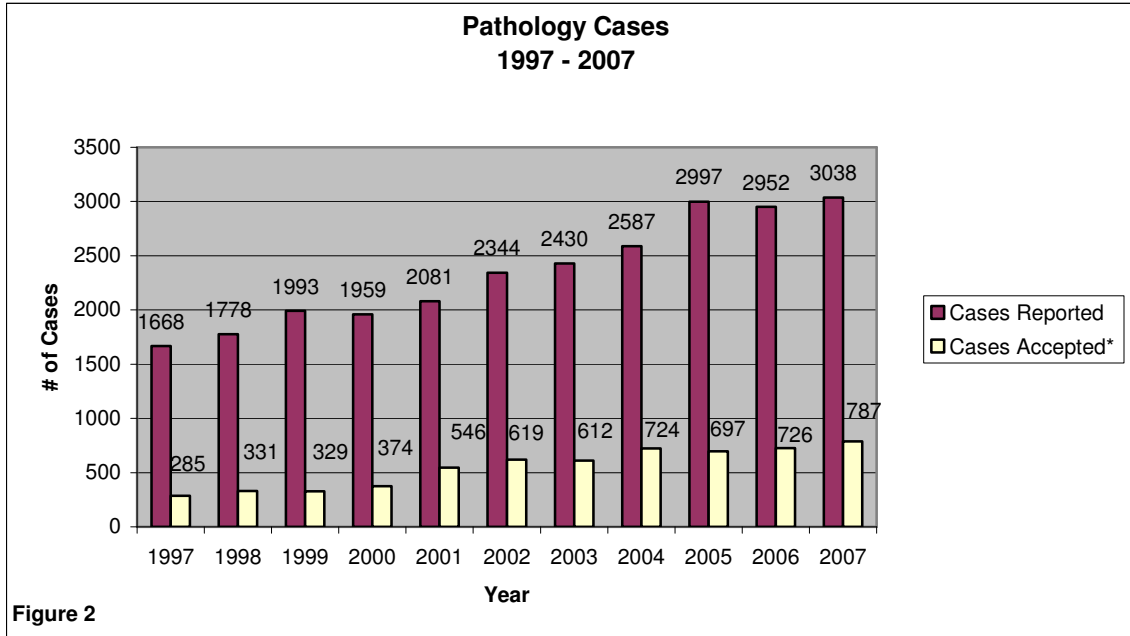


Figure 1

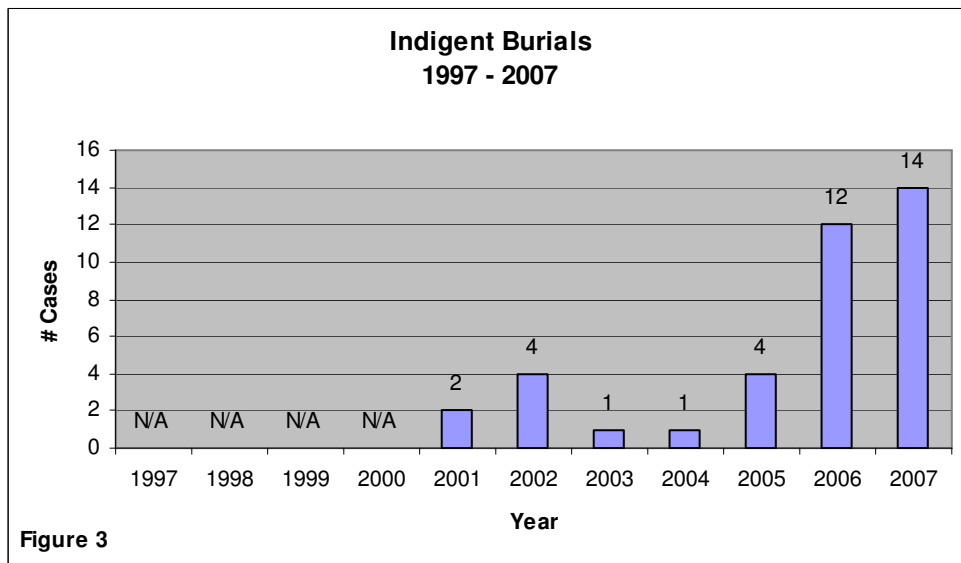
## MEDICAL INVESTIGATIONS

The Pathology division has four medical investigators who are on duty year round, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The investigators triaged 3038 reported deaths, and accepted jurisdiction in 787 cases [Figure 2]. In many cases, an investigator will attend the scene of the death. The number of scene investigations by medical investigators per year has shown a steady increase since 1996.



\*Records Reviews, Autopsies, and External Examinations

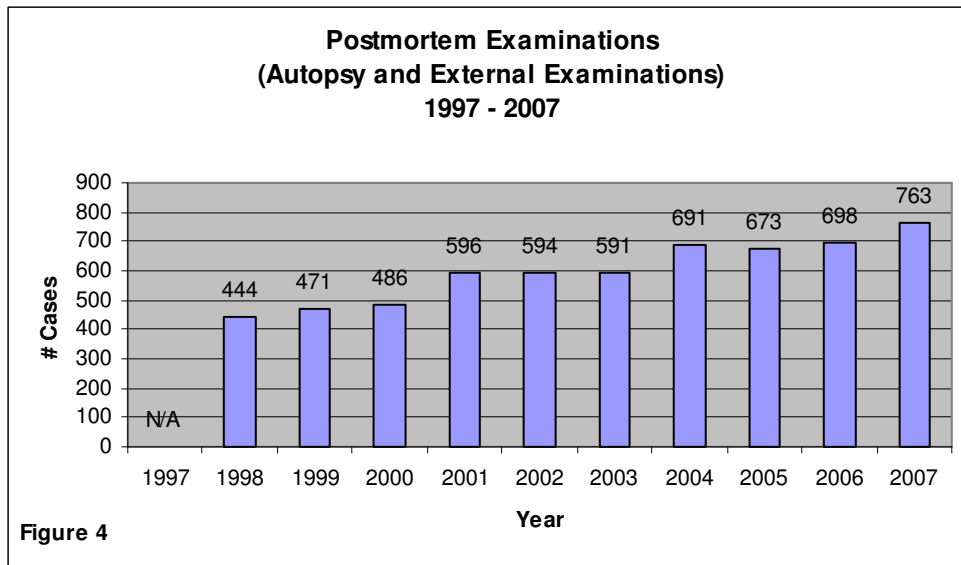
The Medical Investigators are also tasked with locating responsible parties to claim bodies. All unclaimed bodies are given indigent burials by Sedgwick County. In 2007, 14 bodies remained unclaimed/indigent despite a diligent search [Figure 3].



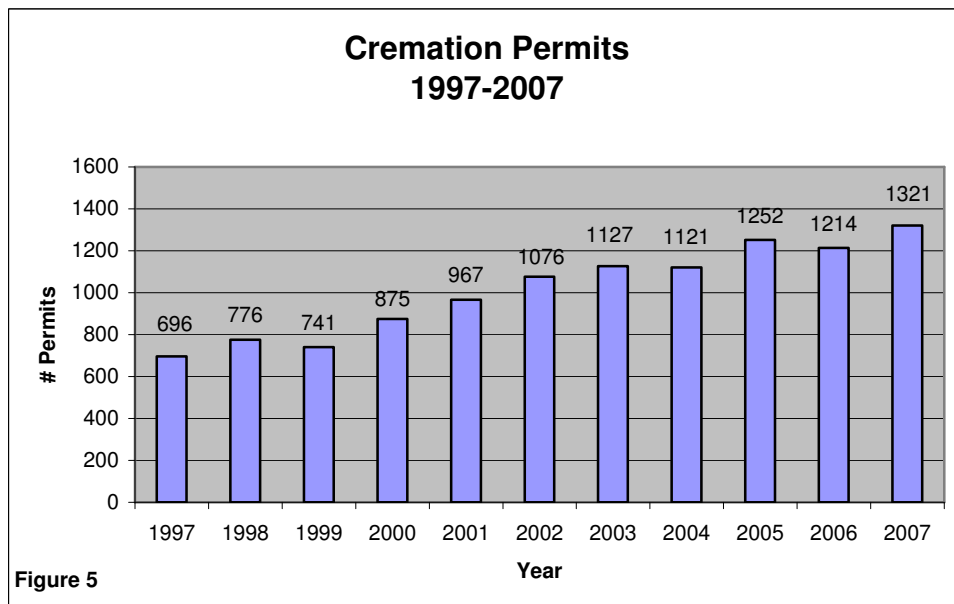
## CASE SUBMISSIONS

In 2007, 3038 deaths from Sedgwick County and referring counties were reported. For Sedgwick County deaths, analysis of the scene, circumstances of the death and the decedent's medical history were key factors in determining coroner's jurisdiction. Coroner's jurisdiction for the referring counties was determined by the referring county Coroner. Jurisdiction was assumed or assistance was provided in 787 cases, of which 627 received complete autopsies. Figure 4 shows the number of postmortem exams, that includes both autopsy and external examinations. The remaining postmortem examinations included external examinations and records reviews for death certification. External examinations are performed in cases where scene investigation, circumstances, and medical history and the exam are sufficient to certify the death.

The District Coroner also performed autopsies or external examination for other counties within the state of Kansas.

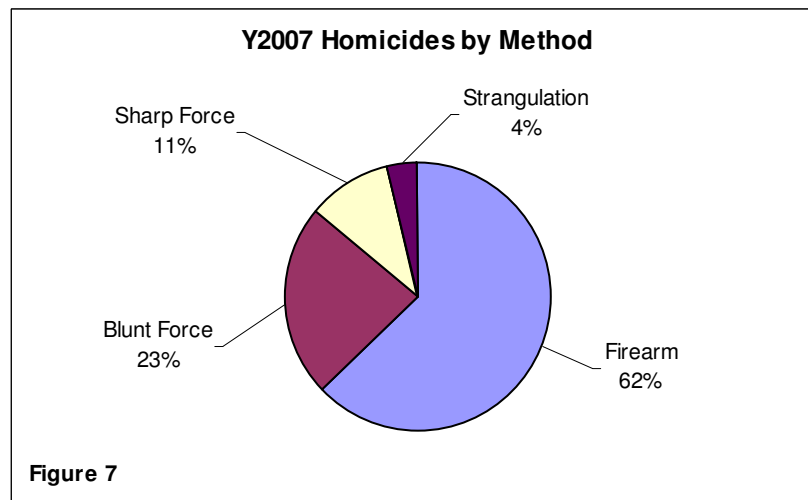
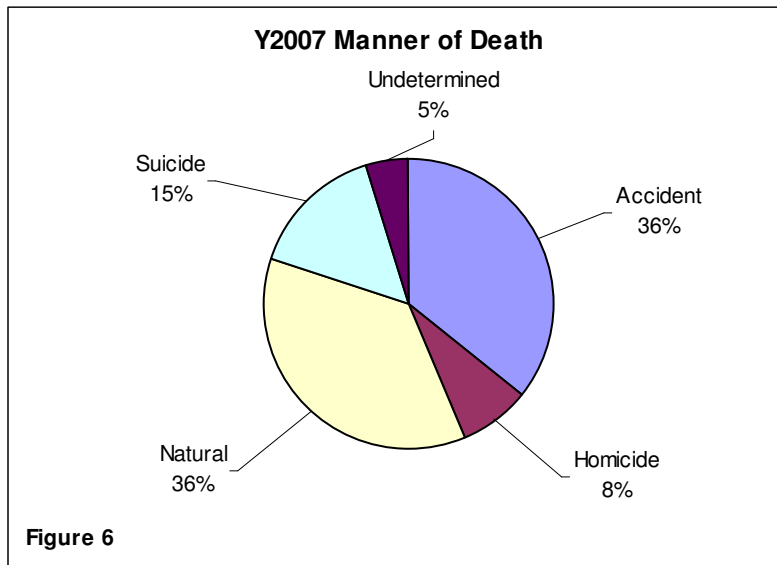


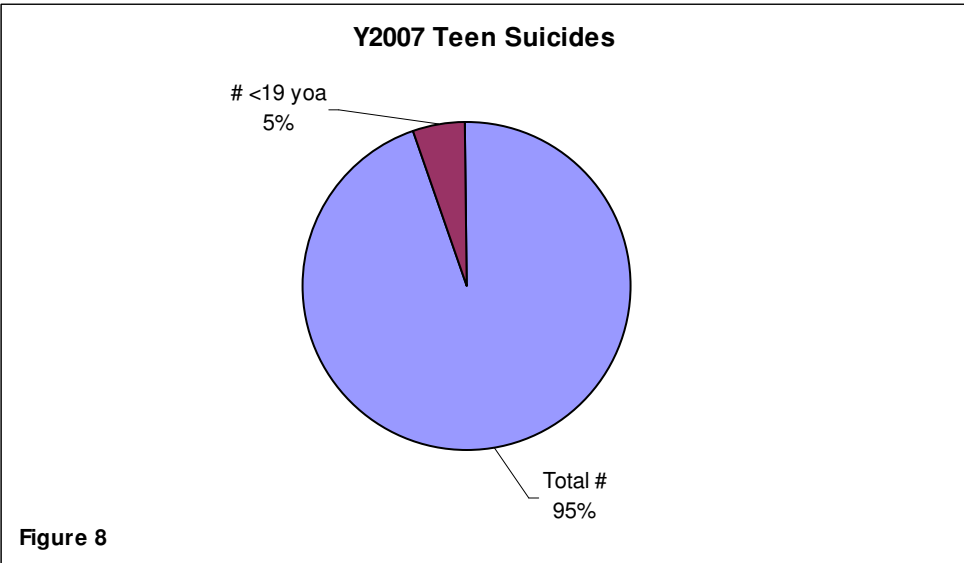
In the state of Kansas, the Coroner is also charged with the investigation of death if the body is to be cremated. Figure 5 illustrates the steady increase of cremation permits signed by the coroner. This investigation is performed to determine if the death falls under the coroner's jurisdiction, and if so, a postmortem examination may be required prior to cremation.



## MANNER OF DEATH

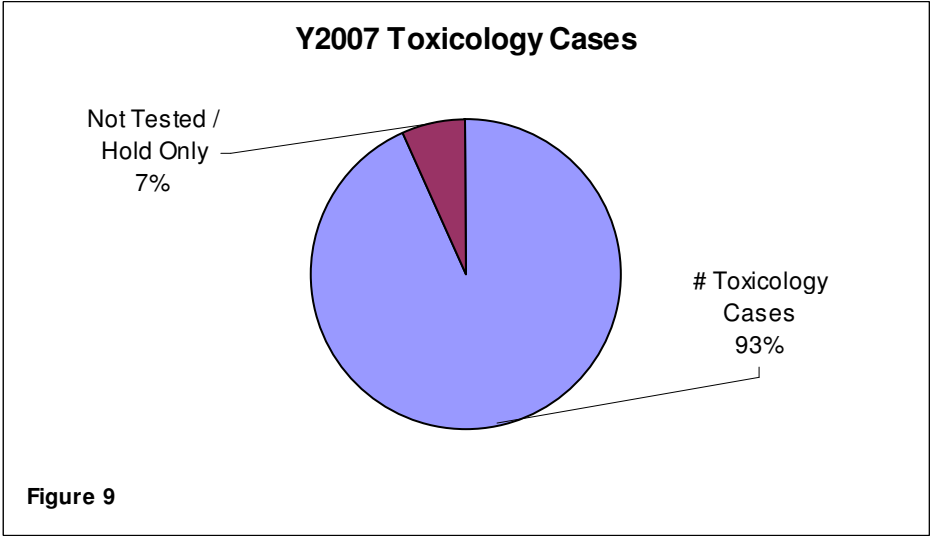
In addition to determining cause of death, the District Coroner is responsible for determining the manner of death. Figure 6 shows the breakdown of the deaths by manner. Homicides are deaths that result from injuries that are a result of the actions by another person. Homicides constituted 8% of the cases for 2007. The majority (62%) of these deaths results from gunshot wounds [Figure 7]. Suicides are defined as deaths that result from a purposeful action to end one's own life. In 2007, 15% of the cases were certified as suicides. Teenage suicides constituted 5% of these deaths [Figure 8]. Deaths that were certified as accidents are those that result from an unintentional event or chain of events. This category includes most motor vehicle accidents, falls, and accidental drug overdoses. Natural deaths are those that are solely caused by natural disease and constituted 36% of the cases. The most common cause of death in cases of sudden, unexpected natural death is coronary artery disease. Cases that were classified as an undetermined manner of death constituted 5% of the total caseload.





**Toxicology**

In Y2007, 763 cases specimens for toxicological analyses were collected. Figure 9 illustrates the percentage of cases analyses performed.



Alcohol was detected [ $>0.02\text{gm } \%$ ] in 23% of the tested cases. Drugs were detected in 67% of the tested cases.