

ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES
Sedgwick County Regional Forensic Science Center
1109 North Minneapolis Street, Wichita, Kansas 67214

August 19, 2021

Board Members Present

- Dr. Shelly Steadman, Director, Regional Forensic Science Center
- Dr. Ron Varner (Chair), Coroner, 13th District
- Fire Chief Tammy Snow, Wichita Fire Department
- C.D. Dugan, Interim Fire Marshal, Wichita Fire Department
- Paul Misasi, Deputy Director of Operations, Sedgwick County EMS
- Dr. Timothy Gorrill, Coroner, 18th District
- Brad Crisp, Deputy Chief, Sedgwick County Fire District #1
- Ann Swegle, District Attorney's Office
- Jennifer Magana, City Attorney, City of Wichita
- Russell Leeds, Assistant County Manager
- Darrell Atterberry, Chief of Police, Bel Aire
- Jeffrey Easter, Sedgwick County Sheriff
- Melissa Walker, Director, WSU Hugo Wall School of Public Affairs

Board Members Absent

- Dr. Garold Minns, Dean, KU School of Medicine-Wichita

Attendees Present

- Katie Asbury, Forensic Administrator, Regional Forensic Science Center
- Shari Beck, Chief Medical Investigator, Regional Forensic Science Center
- Amy Renee Leiker, The Wichita Eagle

AGENDA

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:02 AM.

II. Introductions

III. Approval of Minutes from the April 18, 2019 Meeting

A motion to approve the minutes from the April 18, 2019 meeting was made by Ann Swegle and seconded by Dr. Ron Varner. The minutes were approved unanimously.

IV. RFSC Updates

Dr. Shelly Steadman

- Developed a more thorough mission statement and associated Strategic Plan
- COVID-19
 - Obtained antibody tests to use for presumptive cases on decedents, but PCR results were not received for 7-10 days
 - KBI was receiving evidence but not conducting analysis in their laboratory or transporting evidence
 - Entered into an agreement with WSU MDL to conduct surveillance testing
 - No infection transfer from autopsies or co-workers at the RFSC
 - Increased body storage with an additional cooler purchased with CARES funding
 - Relocated tissue storage to accommodate the cooler installation
- In 2020, saw a ~25% increase in reported deaths
 - Set to experience another increase in 2021
- Increase in scenes attended by ~24%
 - Homicides have increased 36%
- Number of autopsy cases (coroner jurisdiction) increased ~18% in 2020
- Out-of-county autopsies accounted for ~20% of total autopsies
- Suicide rate has remained steady from 2018 to 2020 (approximately 14%)
- Substantial increase in accidental overdoses (discussed counterfeit pills)
- Substantial toxicology backlog due to a significant staff shortage
 - Have now hired 4 additional staff into vacant positions
 - Brought in Dr. Rohrig in for additional days to review cases and assist in decreasing the backlog
- Fully staffed and trained in Drug ID in 2020, and have maintained virtually no backlog in 2021
- Lost the Fire Debris Technical Leader in 2020, but have a new individual trained and carrying out casework
- Lost the Firearms Examiner in 2020, and have a new individual carrying out function testing, with a second individual in training
- Biology backlog has increased, but have two individuals in training and several large projects in process
- Dr. Jaime Oeberst, Deputy County Coroner, has submitted her resignation effective November 2021
 - Prompted a review of case numbers and out-of-county services

V. Agency Reports

Dr. Ron Varner

- Searching for an additional deputy coroner
- Pleased with RFSC services

VI. Discussion: Out-of-County Autopsy Services

Dr. Shelly Steadman

- NAME Accreditation
 - Set of standards accompanied by an annual inspection checklist
 - 2020
 - 629 full autopsies
 - 429 other exams
 - 3 Pathologists
 - 238 exams/doctor/year
 - 2 Pathologists
 - 358 exams/doctor/year (Phase II violation >325)
 - Actively recruiting for a new deputy county coroner
 - In the interim, the solution would be to reduce out-of-county services
 - 2 Pathologists = 271 exams/doctor/year (Phase I violation >250)
- Geographical overview of out-of-county cases
 - Greatest contributor is Reno County
 - Dr. Scott Kipper, Deputy County Coroner, also serves as the Reno County Coroner
- Options to:
 - Temporarily discontinue out-of-county autopsies
 - Continue to provide services for homicide cases
 - Discuss cases that come from correctional facilities

Discussion

- Correctional cases
 - Dr. Varner tried to address correctional services autopsies a few years ago, but the warden advised stopping them was against state law
 - Dr. Varner often has no knowledge that the cases have been referred to Sedgwick County until he sees the death certificate
 - Sheriff Easter noted that the warden is only in charge of the prison, but the coroner maintains the oversight of autopsy cases (per state statute)
- Transportation
 - Will be a substantial cost with 2 trips (pick-up and drop-off)
- Dr. Steadman will follow up with pricing for alternate service providers
- Timeline to end RFSC services
 - RFSC will provide notice in writing
- Doctors are currently overworked and need to find a balance in order to maintain NAME accreditation
- Amount of control by the state needs to be addressed

VII. Discussion: Future of the Advisory Board

Dr. Shelly Steadman

- Dr. Rohrig previously drafted a resolution to dissolve the advisory board
- Received feedback from Mr. Leeds that the advisory board should decide whether the board should be dissolved
- BOCC places a great emphasis on the feedback from advisory boards
- To help encourage attendance, the advisory board could continue meeting virtually with an annual in-person meeting

Ann Swegle

- Would like to see it remain – finds it very beneficial

Dr. Ron Varner

- Attendance was previously a concern, but would like to continue as it's a good service

Sheriff Jeffrey Easter

- Would like to continue with the board but consider meeting less frequently

Deputy Chief Brad Crisp

- Information is valuable but meeting two times a year could be more appropriate
- Don't make a lot of recommendations to the BOCC

Chief Tammy Snow

- Agreed with other comments that meeting twice a year would suffice

Deputy Director Paul Misasi

- Agreed with other comments

Jennifer Magana

- Add the authority to make recommendations to the BOCC if not already included in the resolution
- Would like to receive quarterly reports via email but meet twice a year for discussion

Dr. Melissa Walker

- Agreed with other comments

Dr. Timothy Gorill

- Finds it useful and would be fine with any frequency of meetings

Mr. Russell Leeds

- Should make reappointments of members first, followed by an appointment of new President, Vice-President positions and an updated resolution presented to the BOCC for approval

- BOCC working on future legislation to provide state subsidies for services provided by the RFSC
- Vitally important to keep the RFSC laboratories available in the future

VIII. Appointment of President, Vice-President

To be presented at the next meeting following the BOCC reappointment process of appointment members.

IX. Expired BoCC Appointed Member Terms

Dr. Shelly Steadman

- Director will continue to coordinate the meetings and topics of discussion, but need to formalize appointed members through the BOCC process

Dr. Varner and Chief Atterberry both agreed to continue to serve.

X. Other Business

There was no other business discussed.

XI. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 10:05 AM.

Next Meeting: November 18, 2021 at 9:00 AM
1109 N. Minneapolis Street, Wichita Kansas, 67214 or via Zoom (TBD)