

Testimony
Health Services Interim Committee
April 13, 2016; 1:00 p.m.
North Dakota Department of Health

Good afternoon Chairman Lee and members of the Health Services Interim Committee. My name is Kirby Kruger, and I am the Section Chief for the Medical Services Section of the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH). The Medical Services Section consists of the Office of the Forensic Examiner (OFE) and the Division of Disease Control. I am here today to provide information regarding the availability of cold storage for bodies in North Dakota and to give you an update on the activities of the work group assembled to provide input on autopsies and death investigations.

Cold Storage Capacity for Bodies

The Forensic Examiner's Office and Department of Pathology at UND undertook an inventory of cold storage capacity for body storage in North Dakota. Attachment A provides a table of those findings. Eighteen different facilities, apart from the Department's and UND's storage capacity, reported functioning cold storage. These sites can store up to 94 bodies; this includes room for up to 24 bodies at the Cass County Coroner's Office. UND and the Forensic Examiner's Office have a capacity of 30 and 10 bodies, respectively. The total functioning capacity in North Dakota is at 134 bodies.

Autopsy Work Group

The autopsy work group met on January 8, 2016, and April 4, 2016. At the January 8 meeting, the work group felt that the content of questions at the last hearing indicated that the committee is interested in hearing about how death investigations work in North Dakota. Since the last hearing, the Department worked with Chairman Lee to develop an education presentation for the committee. The presentation from a county coroner's perspective will follow my testimony and be given today by Connie Kadrmas, who has served as the assistant coroner for Stark and Billings Counties.

The work group felt it was important to continue to offer education for county coroners and local and state law enforcement agents through various formats. The group would like to see if the county coroner's functions could be more standardized.

At the April 4 meeting, the group reviewed the progress being made to the Electronic Vital Events Records System (EVERS). This system is being updated to include a function which will prevent physicians from completing death certificates for non-natural deaths. Once EVERS is completed, the Forensic Examiner will test the system to make sure it is functioning. Implementation will require advanced notice to and education for

physicians, physician assistants and nurse practitioners. This system will help to ensure that non-natural deaths are referred to a coroner.

Also at this meeting, the group discussed how to improve being able to investigate deaths that occur at North Dakota hospitals. A common practice of hospitals is to discard specimens after 48 to 72 hours. One of the challenges resulting from this, if a death occurs after hospitalization, is that a blood specimen that was collected at the time of admission may or may not be available for analysis. This blood specimen is important because it could provide information regarding the condition of the patient at the time of admission. A subgroup of this committee will explore how to work with the hospitals in North Dakota to encourage them to hold an admitting blood specimen on certain patients until the patient is discharged. If the patient dies prior to discharge, that blood sample would then go to the county coroner.

This concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Cold Body Storage, North Dakota, January 2016

County	City	Facility	Capacity	Notes
Burleigh	Bismarck	Sanford	2	Hospital use only
	Bismarck	CHI/St. As	2	Hospital use only
	Bismarck	Forensic Examiner	10	
	Bismarck	Sunset	3	
Total Burleigh County			17	
Cass	Fargo	Coroner	20	
	Fargo	Coroner	4	Portable
	Fargo	FH	3	
	Fargo	FH	8	
	Fargo	Essentia	3	
	Fargo	Sanford	3	
	Fargo	VA	3	
Total Cass County			44	
Cavalier	Langdon	FH	2	
Grand Forks	Grand Forks	UND	30	
	Grand Forks	Altru	10	
	Grand Forks	FH	2	
Total Grand Forks County			42	
Golden Valley	Beach	FH	3	
Ramsey	Devils Lake	FH	4	
Rolette	Belcourt	I.H.S	2	Reported to be non-functioning
Stark	Dickinson	FH	6	
	Dickinson	FH	9	
Total Stark County			15	
Ward	Minot	Ward Co.	3	
	Minot	Trinity	4	
	Minot	T-St. Joe's	4	Coolers here are not in use
Total Ward County			11	
Total Functioning Capacity in North Dakota			134	
Total Potential Capacity in North Dakota			140	
Montana	Sidney	FH	3	

FH= funeral home