



OFFICE OF THE MEDICAL INVESTIGATOR

NEW MEXICO BOARD OF MEDICAL INVESTIGATORS MINUTES OF GENERAL MEETING – June 25, 2024

NM Office of the Medical Investigator
The University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center

BOARD PRESENT:

Patricia Finn, MD

Vice Chair

Kent House

Board Member

Josett Monette

Board Member

Dean, UNM School of Medicine

Chair, New Mexico Board of Funeral Services

Cabinet Secretary, New Mexico Dept. of Indian Affairs

BOARD ABSENT:

Patrick Allen

Chair

Troy Weisler

Board Secretary

Cabinet Secretary, New Mexico Dept. of Health

Chief, New Mexico State Police

ATTENDEES:

Natalie Adolphi, PhD

Amy Atiano

Tanasee Boswell

La Vonda Bowens Woodard

Paul Carbajal

Anthony Cervantes

Olivia Cole

Emily Helmrich, DO

Heather Jarrell, MD

Nancy Joste, MD

Jose Lucero

Cory McDowell

Anna Medendorp, PhD.

Josie Navarrette

Kyla Sorensen

Veronica Tovar

Director of the Center for Forensic Imaging, OMI

HR Administrator 2, OMI

Student, Eastern New Mexico University

Director of Operations, OMI

Administrative Assistant 3, OMI

Administrative Officer, OMI

Student, University of New Mexico

Medical Investigator, OMI

Chief Medical Investigator, OMI

Professor, Chair, UNM Dept. of Pathology

Medical Investigations Assistant, OMI

Associate University Counsel, UNM HSC

Forensic Anthropologist, OMI

Administrative Assistant 3, OMI

Accountant 3, OMI

Operations Specialist, OMI

1. **CALL TO ORDER AND CONFIRMATION OF QUORUM**

Dean Finn called the meeting to order at 1:00 PM and confirmed a quorum.

2. **ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA (action item)**

Dean Finn asked for a motion to adopt the agenda. Mr. House **MOVED**. Sec. Monette **SECONDED**. Motion **CARRIED**.

3. **VOTE TO APPROVE MINUTES (action item)**

a. March 18, 2024, General Meeting

Dean Finn asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Mr. House **MOVED**. Sec. Monette **SECONDED**. Motion **CARRIED**.

4. **FY26 LEGISLATIVE FUNDING REQUEST (RPSP) - (information item)**

Chief Medical Investigator, Dr. Heather Jarrell, introduced the FY26 Legislative Funding Request (RPSP) agenda topic with a presentation slide. She explained that the Research and Public Service Projects (RPSP) program is the process through which the University of New Mexico (UNM) requests funding from the legislature. In this context, the Office of the Medical Investigator (OMI) is categorized under higher education. Dr. Jarrell noted that one requirement set by UNM Board of Regents is that RPSP requests must constitute at least 20% of the FY25 budget, which has been met.

The total FY26 RPSP funding request for OMI is approximately \$4,000,000.

Need	Cost
Market driven salary increases to retain current Medical Examiners	\$726,190
Reorganization cost to manage caseload	\$1,617,977
One-year bridge funding to transition locum tenens to permanent Forensic Pathologists	\$1,247,958
Pathology Assistants to manage increased caseload	\$478,970

OMI Medical Examiner Salaries:

The OMI Medical Examiners are housed within the Department of Pathology at UNM through the School of Medicine.

- Current OMI Medical Examiner salaries are at the 25th percentile for academic pathologists (based on Association of American Medical Colleges [AAMC])
- The OMI is the only statewide medical examiner’s office housed within a university.
- Current medical examiner workforce shortage in US
 - 800 medical examiners (estimated)
 - Need a least 1,500 medical examiners in the US.
- Current competition for forensic pathologists:
 - 41 Job postings as of 6/24/2024
 - 37 US graduates from training in 2024
 - Average salary offer is \$275,000
 - Salary range: \$217,000 to \$400,000
 - Median salary: \$280,500
- UNMH has listened and responded to our urgent need for recruitment, with salary increases above the average and median salary offer, as well as retention bonus eligibility at year 3, with a commitment to remain for 2 more years. Dr. Jarrell noted

that in her ten years at OMI, the office has been fully staffed for only about a year in total. Thanks to the support from UNMH and UNM Leadership, effective July 1, 2024, the salary increase offer for forensic pathologists will surpass the median and average salaries, enhancing OMI's competitiveness in the job market.

Dr. Jarrell highlighted that OMI currently has 6 forensic pathologists, including herself. Based on current caseloads, the office should have 11 pathologists. She shared promising news that two graduating residents have recently signed letters of offer. These residents will start their yearlong forensic pathology fellowship in July, which means that OMI will have increased number of pathologists within a year. There is optimism that with the competitive salary packages, the recruitment process will continue to be successful.

- Current cost with 6 medical examiners: \$356,952
- Total cost with 10 medical examiners: \$726,190

Bridge Funding for Locum Tenens Medical Examiners:

Dr. Jarrell emphasized that offering competitive salary ranges for recruitment is more fiscally responsible strategy compared to the alternative of hiring locum tenens medical examiners. Locum tenens, who are essentially temporary medical examiners traveling across the country to work in various offices for short periods, are significantly expensive. The current cost of locum tenens while OMI is short-staffed is approximately \$100,000 per month. Dr. Jarrell presented a slide highlighting the projected cost for locum tenens for FY26, which amounts to \$1.2 million. She noted that the request for funding could be provided as non-recurring bridge funding to cover locum tenens costs until staffing levels are stabilized through competitive recruitment strategies.

Dr. Jarrell also noted that locum tenens do not handle criminally suspicious cases or homicides, leaving permanent staff to manage these more challenging cases. This has significantly increased the workload of existing pathologists, many of whom are handling caseloads as high as 400 autopsy equivalents per year, compared to the standard of 250 to avoid phase deficiencies. Exceeding certain thresholds can lead to phase one or phase two deficiencies, with the latter risking the loss of accreditation and contribute to the burnout of the six pathologist who are bearing these heavy caseloads.

Locums - Projected Cost of Locums for FY26

Clinical Effort	★ FTE	Phase I Deficiency	Phase II Deficiency
		250 Cases	325 Cases
Dvorscak, Lauren	0.50	156	203
Gallego, Daniel	0.60	188	244
Helmrich, Emily	★ 0.80	250	325
Jarrell, Heather	0.50	156	203
Kerr, Aidan	0.80	250	325
Kerwin, Audra	0.80	250	325
FY26 New Hire	0.80	250	325
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Total Cases Based on FTE	5.60	1750	2275
CY23 Case Load Adjusted to Autopsy Equiv.		2339	2339
Difference based on 2339 autopsy equiv.		589	64
Number of Autopsies (43% of cases)		253	28
Number of Path External (57% of cases)		1007	109
Autopsy Cost @ \$1,400 per case		354,554	38,504
Path External Cost @ \$800 per case		805,697	87,497
Total: Locums Cost by Exam		\$ 1,160,251	\$ 126,001
Days on service (3 autopsies and 3 path externals per day)		210	22.81
Travel	Cost per Day/Week	Travel Cost	Travel Cost
Airfare (4 flights per month/1 flight per week)	650	\$ 31,200	\$ 7,800
Lodging (daily)	150	\$ 31,509	\$ 3,422
Per Diem (daily)	59	\$ 12,394	\$ 1,346
Car Rental (daily)	60	\$ 12,604	\$ 1,369
Total: Travel Costs		\$ 87,707	\$ 13,937
Total Cost for Locums		\$ 1,247,958	\$ 139,938

*Assuming that 43% of the cases are autopsies and 57% are path externals

Reorganization Costs:\$1,617,977

PA Support: \$478,970

- Field Investigations Mid-Level Supervisor Positions
 - 1 person supervising 100 field investigators across the entire state.
 - 2024: 56 undocumented migrant deaths, 8 Field Deputy Medical Investigators in Dona Ana County (2023: 116 deaths)
- Other Supervisor Positions
- PA Support for caseloads:

The OMI has 1.5 Pathologists' Assistants (PA). PA's help with our non-criminally suspicious cases.

5. **BUDGET - (information item)**

Dr. Jarrell presented an overview of the OMI FY24 income statement projections for the period from July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024. Dr. Jarrell highlighted that we are projected to have a positive margin of approximately \$700,000 this year, attributed to the following factors:

- Faculty savings resulting from the vacancy of needed forensic pathologists' positions
- Delays in onboarding locum tenens.

Dr. Jarrell observed that our current state appropriations amount is \$10.6 million, compared to \$5.3 million in 2021.

OMI FY24 Income Statement Projections 7/1/23 - 6/30/24			
Revenue			
	Operating Revenue		
	State Appropriations		\$10,628,000
	University Hospital Revenue		\$613,077
	Sandoval Regional MC Revenue		\$23,953
	Cremation Permits		\$3,375,630
	Other Sales and Services		\$1,082,667
	NYU RECOVER Cohort Autopsy Study		\$46,769
	Intra University Activities		
	Gains from Sponsored Projects		\$397,349
	Transfer & Allocation		(\$136,709)
	FEMA Covid-Related Reimbursement		-
Total Revenue			\$16,030,736
Expenses			
	Salary & Fringe		\$9,993,763
	Locum Tenens - Forensic Pathologists		\$153,665
	Body Transportation		\$2,027,934
	Utilities & Plant Maintenance (SLD, Security, Kone Elevator, Pest Control, etc...)		\$770,984
	Equipment Warranties (CME annual licence, Siemens, CT Scanner mis maintenance, etc...)		\$299,398
	Services (CLEAR database, records storage, PACS, Grief Consult, TriCore, etc...)		\$178,461
	Patient Care Expenses (PPEs, Body Bags, Formalin, etc...)		\$435,370
	NMS		\$146,774
	Other Expenses (Appr's Overhead, travel, FDMIs mileage reimb, Supplies, Banner tax, etc...)		\$1,424,387
Total Expenses			\$15,430,736
FY24 Projected Net			\$600,000
FY23 Reserves			\$134,222
FY24 Overall Projected Net			\$ 734,222

Dr. Jarrell presented an overview of the OMI FY25 income statement projections for the period from July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025. Dr. Jarrell highlighted that we are projected to have a deficit of approximately \$600,000 this year, attributed to expenses incurred due to locums.

OMI FY25 Income Statement Projections 7/1/24 - 6/30/25		
Revenue		
Operating Revenue		
	State Appropriations: Recurring	\$10,955,600
	State Appropriations: One-Time for Capital Projects	\$3,465,100
	University Hospital Revenue	\$666,400
	Sandoval Regional MC Revenue	\$33,360
	Cremation Permits	\$3,372,000
	Other Sales and Services	\$1,113,264
	NYU RECOVER Cohort Autopsy Study	\$50,864
	Intra University Activities	
	Gains from Sponsored Projects	\$66,440
	Transfer & Allocation	(\$3,458,798)
	FEMA Covid-Related Reimbursement	-
Total Revenue		\$16,264,230
Expenses		
	Salary & Fringe	\$11,132,242
	Locum Tenens - Forensic Pathologists	\$1,356,749
	Body Transportation	\$2,004,000
	Utilities & Plant Maintenance (SLD, Security, Kone Elevator, Pest Control, etc...)	\$760,887
	Equipment Warranties (CME annual licence, Siemens, CT Scanner mis maintenance, etc...)	\$150,978
	Services (CLEAR database, records storage, PACS, Grief Consult, TriCore, etc...)	\$160,804
	Patient Care Expenses (PPEs, Body Bags, Formalin, etc...)	\$453,000
	NMS	\$228,000
	Other Expenses (Appr's Overhead, travel, FDMIs mileage reimb, Supplies, Banner tax, etc...)	1,341,837.86
Total Expenses		\$17,588,498
FY25 Projected Net		(\$1,324,268)
FY24 Projected Reserves		\$600,000
FY23 Reserves		\$134,222
FY25 Overall Projected Net		\$ (590,046)

6. **PUBLIC COMMENT**

No public comment

7. **ADJORNMENT**

Dean Finn asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. House **MOVED**. Sec. Monette **SECONDED**. Motion **CARRIED**. The meeting **ADJOURNED** at 1:34 PM.