



OFFICE OF THE  
MEDICAL INVESTIGATOR

NEW MEXICO BOARD OF MEDICAL INVESTIGATORS  
MINUTES OF MEETING- June 23, 2020

NM Office of the Medical Investigator  
The University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center  
\*\*VIRTUAL MEETING\*\*

**BOARD PRESENT:**

<b>Paul Roth, MD</b> <i>Board Chair</i>	Chancellor of HSC, UNM, Dean School of Medicine
<b>Kathy Kunkel</b> <i>Vice Chair</i>	Cabinet Secretary, NM Dept. of Health
<b>David Houston</b> <i>Board Member</i>	Chairman, New Mexico Board of Funeral Services
<b>Tim Johnson</b> <i>Board Member</i>	Chief, New Mexico State Police
<b>Stephanie Salazar</b> <i>Designate</i>	Cabinet Secretary Designate, NM Dept. of Indian Affairs

**BOARD ABSENT:**

<b>Lynn Trujillo</b> <i>Board Member</i>	Cabinet Secretary, NM Dept. of Indian Affairs
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**ATTENDEES:**

Heather Jarrell, MD	Interim Chief Medical Investigator, NM OMI
Lauren Dvorscak, MD	Interim Assistant Chief Medical Investigator, NM OMI
Ross Zumwalt, MD	Medical Investigator, NM OMI
Lauren Decker, MD	Medical Investigator, NM OMI
Lori Proe, DO	Medical Investigator, NM OMI
Clarissa Krinsky, MD	Medical Investigator, NM OMI
Natalie Adolphi, PhD	Director, Center for Forensic Imaging, NM OMI
Martha McGrew, MD,	Executive Vice Dean, UNM School of Medicine
Nancy Joste, MD	Professor, Interim Department Chair, UNM Dept. of Pathology
Donna Sigl, MD, MS	Professor, UNM Psychiatry Administration
April Rodriguez	Mgr. Acad. Affairs/UNM SOM
Scot Sauder	Deputy University Counsel, UNM HSC
Alexandra Garley	Administrative Assistant 3 NM OMI
Amy Wyman	Supervisor of Field Investigations, NM OMI
Elizabeth Gonzales	Supervisor of Central Office Investigations, NM OMI
Albert Arocha	Supervisor of Morphology Services, NM OMI
Anthony Cervantes	Unit Administrator, Asst. to the Interim Chief MI, NM OMI

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

Dr. Roth called the meeting to order at 1:02 PM

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

Dr. Roth asked for a motion to adopt the agenda. Sec. Kunkel **MOVED**, Chief Johnson **SECONDED**. All were in favor. Motion **CARRIED**.

3. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES (action item)**

Sec. Kunkel **MOVED** to approve the October 7, 2019 general meeting minutes, Chief Johnson **SECONDED**. All were in favor. Motion **CARRIED**.

4. **Introduction of Dr. Martha McGrew**

Dr. Roth announced that he will be stepping down as the Dean for UNM School of Medicine on June 30, 2020. By nature of the Board of Medical Investigators bylaws, Dr. Martha McGrew will be taking Dr. Roth's place on the OMI board. Dr. Roth reminds the board to vote a new chair in the next general meeting

5. **Report from the Interim Chief Medical Investigator**

Dr. Heather Jarrell opens her report by thanking the board for allowing her to become the interim chief of OMI on April 1, 2020.

Graduating Fellows:

Dr. Jarrell recognized the OMI graduating Forensic Pathology Fellows.

- Nicole Jackson, MD, MPH  
Accepted a position at the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office in Chicago, IL.
- Benjamin Murie, DO  
Accepted a position at the Clark County Coroner's Office Las Vegas, NV
- Catherine Nicka, MD  
Begins a Surgical Pathology Fellowship at UNM  
Accepted a position at Siskiyou County Coroner's Office, Yreka, CA
- Karen Zeigler, DO  
Accepted a position at the Office of the San Francisco Medical Examiner

OMI Operations during COVID-19:

Dr. Jarrell spoke about precautions the OMI is taking for safe operations during the COVID-19 pandemic. In mid-March limited personnel will begin working from home. There will be a rotating schedule for all faculty and staff, which limits the number of faculty and staff physically working in the office. There will be 2 forensic pathologist on duty. Administration, records, accounting and managers will operate on a rotating schedules. As a critical operation, the OMI will not close to the public; therefore, barriers and guidelines were established for social distancing to continue servicing the public, as well as law enforcement (LE) observing autopsies. The main goal is to keep faculty and staff safe, given that no one else in the state can perform OMI's duties.

Dr. Jarrell continued on and discussed how the OMI investigative and autopsy personnel are operating during COVID-19. The OMI investigations unit is operating with 1 investigator in the office at all times, and 2-5 investigators working from home responding to death scenes. Investigators are issued personal protective equipment (PPE) to use while on scene interacting with LE and families. The OMI autopsy suite is a biosafety level 3 lab (BSL-3) where autopsy personnel have always worn N95 masks. As a result of COVID-19, N95 masks are in high

demand and the OMI had to look at other options for PPE. OMI autopsy personnel have switched the main source of PPE to Powered Air Purifying Respirator (PAPR) and half masks with P100 filters. N95s will only be used for backup in the autopsy suite.

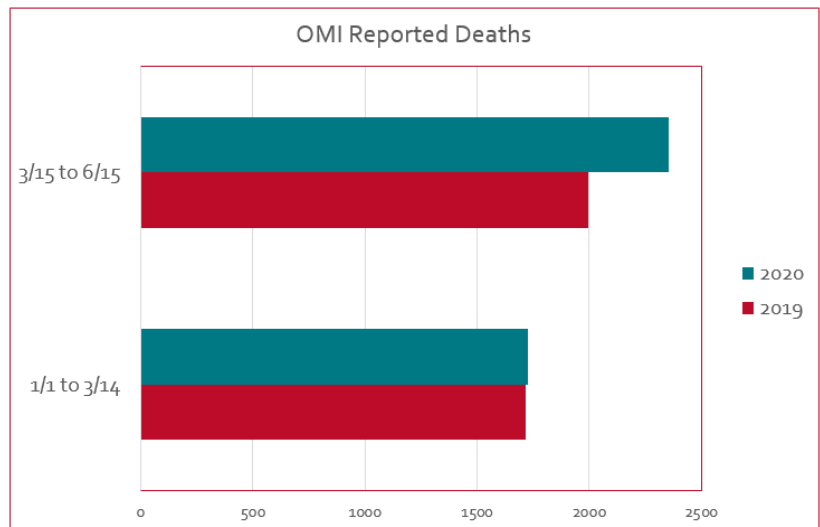
COVID-19 Autopsies:

Nationwide, many medical examiner jurisdictions are NOT performing autopsies on COVID decedents due to overwhelming number of cases, incapable facility (no positive pressure suite) and/or lack of staff support. Dr. Jarrell attended a virtual meeting for American Association of Neuropathologist (AANP) which confirmed that OMI is one of the few medical examiner offices who are consistently performing COVID autopsies. OMI has been able to perform full autopsies on unattended deaths (hospital deaths where a diagnosis has been made), in our 3 isolation suites; includes nasopharyngeal swab, 2 viral lung swabs. The first OMI COVID autopsy workup was performed on 3/11/2020. As of 6/19/2020 the OMI has performed approximately 202 autopsy workups for COVID-19, with 26 positive cases and 5 tests pending. The autopsies that are positive for COVID-19:

- McKinley 10
- San Juan 7
- Albuquerque 6
- Consults: San Felipe Pueblo 1, Chinle 1
- Santa Fe 1

Dr. Jarrell refers to the PowerPoint slide that illustrates how COVID-19 has effected OMI operations and case load.

Increased Case Load, Direct and Indirect Effects of COVID



Dr. Jarrell summarized how OMI is handling decedent storage during the pandemic. OMI's cooler capacity is 150 decedents and OMI was already over capacity when the pandemic began. As part of the OMI Mass Fatality Pandemic and influenza Plan that was implemented due to COVID, the OMI will assist any entity that stores decedents (hospitals, funeral homes etc.) with long or short term storage during the pandemic. OMI and NM Department of Health (DOH) worked with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to obtain 3 refrigerated trailers in anticipation of COVID deaths in New Mexico. The units are housed in the parking lot

adjacent to the OMI. Three additional units were obtained and sent to Las Cruces, San Juan and McKinley County. In order to give the decedents respect and privacy the OMI had a privacy fence built around the trailers. DOH purchased racks to place the decedents on while stored in the units. The National Guard assisted with assembling and install of the racks and privacy tents. The refrigerated climate controlled trailers can store up to 56 decedents, currently there are 60 decedents in the units. Security was hired for 24/7 watch of the area.

Dr. Jarrell continued her presentation and highlighted COVID-19 related expenses on the next PowerPoint slide.

Covid-19 Related Expenses As of 6/5/20	
PPE (PAPRs, Gloves, Face Masks, and Other Respirators) Fit Testing for staff, including on-call staff Other Lab Supplies Body bags	\$ 109,317
FEMA Refrigerated Truck-Related Expenses: Safety Equipment, Portable handwashing station, Portable Toilet, Heavy Equipment, etc...	\$ 35,425
Office Covid-19 Related Expenses: Counter safety shield protections, Temperature check guns, Webcam, Lodging for In-state travel for trailers inspections, etc...	\$ 11,428
Covid OT Hours	\$ 2,396
LTD - body transport	\$ 5,369
<b>Total Covid-19 Related Spending As of 6/5/20</b>	<b>\$ 163,936</b>

**6. Budget (information item)**

Dr. Jarrell identified items in the board packet and gave an update about the OMI budget.

Documents presented:

- FY20 Income Statement Projection 7/1/19 – 6/30/20
- FY21 Income Statement Projection 7/1/20 – 6/30/21

Items Noted:

FY20 the OMI will pay off the UNM School of Medicine debt. Dr. Jarrell recognized Dr. Nolte for paying off the debt while he was the Chief of OMI.

FY21 the OMI will receive a 6% decrease in state appropriation bringing the total deficit to 500K Dr. Jarrell submitted 1.4 million dollar grant to The National Institute of Justice. A 4% percent salary increase is budgeted into FY21 but may not happen.

**OMI FY20 Income Statement Projection 7/1/19 – 6/30/20**

<b>Revenue</b>	
<b>Operating Revenue</b>	
University Hospital Revenue	\$1,049,275
Sandoval Regional MC Revenue	\$33,696
Other Revenue Services	\$4,130,101
<b>Non-operating Revenue</b>	
State Appropriation	\$5,759,300
<b>Intra University Activities</b>	
Transfer & Allocation	\$39,933
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$11,012,305</b>
<b>Expenses</b>	
Salary & Fringe	\$6,344,566
Body Transportation	\$1,137,994
Utilities & Plant Maintenance (SLD, Security, Kone Elevato	\$467,377
Equipment Warranties (Phillips, Siemens, Stryker, C-Scan T	\$264,180
Services (Locums, J&J, Janitorial, Waste Destruction, Malpract	\$964,681
Patient Care Expenses	\$385,808
NMS - Toxicology	\$48,035
Other Expenses (Appropriation's Overhead Charge, bad debt	\$1,007,674
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$10,620,315</b>
<b>FY20 Projected Net</b>	<b>\$391,990</b>
<b>Estimated Grief Appropriation To Be Returned</b>	<b>(\$55,000)</b>
<b>FY19 Deficit Reserves</b>	<b>(\$168,216)</b>
<b>FY20 Overall Projected Net</b>	<b>\$168,774</b>

**OMI FY21 Income Statement Projection 7/1/20 – 6/30/21**

<b>Revenue</b>	
<b>Operating Revenue</b>	
University Hospital Revenue	\$1,049,275
Sandoval Regional MC Revenue	\$33,696
Other Revenue Services	\$4,130,101
<b>Non-operating Revenue</b>	
State Appropriation	\$5,759,300
<b>Intra University Activities</b>	
Transfer & Allocation	(\$68,701)
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$10,903,671</b>
<b>Expenses</b>	
Salary & Fringe	\$6,910,716
Body Transportation	\$1,206,000
Utilities & Plant Maintenance (SLD, Security, Kone Elevator,	\$479,377
Equipment Warranties (Phillips, Siemens, Stryker, C-Scan Te	\$184,105
Services (Locums, J&J, Janitorial, Waste Destruction, Malpractic	\$1,222,579
Patient Care Expenses	\$295,808
NMS - Toxicology	\$51,175
Other Expenses (Appropriation's Overhead Charge, bad debt, \	\$895,674
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$11,245,434</b>
<b>FY21 Projected Net</b>	<b>(\$341,763)</b>
<b>FY20 Reserves</b>	<b>\$168,774</b>
<b>FY21 Overall Projected Net</b>	<b>(\$172,989)</b>

7. **National ME Shortage**

Dr. Jarrell presented a slide and noted that figures from 2013 already outdated, given a 0.8% population increase each year, plus an overwhelming opioid epidemic. The OMI is accredited by the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME). Under this accreditation, if a forensic pathologist performs more than 250 autopsies per year the office will get a phase 1 deficiency. If a pathologist performs more than 350 autopsies per year the office will get a phase 2 deficiency. Phase 2 deficiency means NO NAME accreditation. The office cannot have more than 15 phase 1 deficiencies. The OMI currently has 5 fulltime forensic pathologists and needs 9-11. The OMI supplements the shortage with locums. Locums cost the OMI approximately 3K per day.



**NM** OFFICE OF THE MEDICAL INVESTIGATOR

(2013) U.S. needs 1,100 board certified FPs

❖ Currently has approximately 400-500 practicing FPs

*Other than working twice as hard, why does this matter?*

NAME Inspection and Accreditation Checklist  
Autopsy Facilities Accreditation  
Second Version  
Adopted November 1, 2018



Is the medical staff of sufficient size that no autopsy physician is required to perform more than 325 autopsies/year? (See note after G2j)	II	Y	N/A	N
Is the medical staff of sufficient size that no autopsy physician is required to perform more than 250 autopsies/year?	I	Y	N/A	N



"When caseload exceeds 350 autopsies, mistakes are being made and the quality of the autopsy is being sacrificed." Vincent DiMaio, *Forensic Pathology 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*

Are 90% of reports of all postmortem examinations completed within 90 calendar days from the time of autopsy?	II	Y	N/A	N
Are 90% of reports of all postmortem examinations completed within 60 calendar days from the time of autopsy?	I	Y	N/A	N

Dr. Jarrell reviewed the next slide and highlighted national job openings for forensic pathologist listed on the NAME listserv. There are 31 postings for medical examiners and some offices need multiple positions filed, just as the OMI does.

**Solution:  
Competitive  
FP Hiring**

Job Openings

[How to post ads](#)

Note: Positions in NAME accredited facilities are indicated with **Bold red**

[Forensic Pathologist - Charleston WV 10-26-2019 - 10-26-2020](#)

**[Chief Medical Examiner - Baltimore, MD 1-21-2020 - 7-21-2020](#)**

[Deputy Medical Examiner - Madison WI 3-2-2020 - 7-2-2020](#)

**[Assistant Medical Examiner Baltimore MD 3-3-2020 - 8-3-2020](#)**

**[Forensic Pathologist LOCUM TENENS - Mesquite, TX 3-10-2020 - 7-10-2020](#)**

**[Forensic Pathologist - Mesquite, TX 3-10-2020 - 7-10-2020](#)**

**[Deputy Medical Examiner - Austin, TX 3-12-2020 - 9-12-2020](#)**

**[Disease Control Officer - Associate Pathologist - Seattle, WA 3-19-2020 - 7-19-2020](#)**

**[Faculty Forensic Pathologist/Medical Examiner - Albuquerque, NM 4-20-2020 - 6-20-2020](#)**

**[Deputy Medical Examiner - Greenville, SC 4-22-2020 - 6-22-2020](#)**

[Chief of Investigations - Lacombe, LA 4-23-2020 - 6-23-2020](#)

[Part-Time Investigator - Lacombe, LA 4-23-2020 - 6-23-2020](#)

**[Medical Examiner Investigator I - San Diego CA 4-27-2020 - 6-27-2020](#)**

**[Associate Medical Examiner - Atlanta, GA 4-27-2020 - 6-27-2020](#)**

**[Associate Medical Examiner - Jacksonville, FL 4-29-2020 - 6-29-2020](#)**

[Deputy Chief Medical Examiner - Honolulu, HI 4-30-2020 - 6-30-2020](#)

**[Forensic Pathologist - Syracuse, NY 5-7-2020 - 7-7-2020](#)**

**[Chief Medical Investigator - Albuquerque, NM 5-7-2020 - 7-7-2020](#)**

[Deputy Chief Medical Examiner - Honolulu, HI 4-30-2020 - 6-30-2020](#)

**[Forensic Pathologist - Syracuse, NY 5-7-2020 - 7-7-2020](#)**

**[Chief Medical Investigator - Albuquerque, NM 5-7-2020 - 7-7-2020](#)**

[Medical Examiner \(At-Will\) - Florence, AZ 5-12-2020 - 7-12-2020](#)

**[Medical Examiner/Forensic Pathologist - Las Vegas, NV 5-13-2020 - 7-13-2020](#)**

[Medical Examiner - Astoria, OR 5-20-2020 - 7-20-2020](#)

**[Associate Medical Examiner \(Forensic Pathologist\) - Decatur, GA 5-26-2020 - 7-26-2020](#)**

**[Associate Medical Examiner \(Forensic Pathologist\) - Macon/Pooler 5-26-2020 - 7-26-2020](#)**

**[Forensic Pathologist/Medical Examiner - Johnson City, TN 5-27-2020 - 7-27-2020](#)**

[Deputy Medical Examiner - Olathe, KS 6-2-2020 - 8-2-2020](#)

**[Per Diem Forensic Pathologists - Baltimore, MD 6-2-2020 - 8-2-2020](#)**

**[Chief Medical Examiner - Spokane, WA 6-2-2020 - 8-2-2020](#)**

**[Deputy Medical Examiner - Spokane, WA 6-2-2020 - 8-2-2020](#)**

**[Forensic Pathology Fellow - San Diego, CA 6-4-2020 - 8-4-2020](#)**

**[Forensic Pathologist - Nashville, TN 6-8-2020 - 8-8-2020](#)**

[Forensic Pathologist - Kansas City, KS 6-8-2020 - 8-8-2020](#)

[Chief Medical Examiner - San Francisco, CA 6-9-2020 - 8-9-2020](#)

[Associate Medical Examiner - Rockledge, FL 6-9-2020 - 8-9-2020](#)

[Forensic Pathologist - Lacombe, LA 6-20-2020 - 8-20-2020](#)

Recruitment Plan:

**Recruitment  
Plan**

- Utilized Recruiting Agency (early 2020)
- ❖ Recommendation: Bring FP compensation from 25<sup>th</sup> % to the 50<sup>th</sup> %
- ❖ Minimum of one year to recruit 4 FPs

The OMI is currently conducting faculty searches to fill current vacant forensic pathologist positions.



**8. Update of Chief Search**

Dr. Sigl updated the board on the search for a new OMI Chief Medical Investigator. The position was first posted on November 25, 2019 with a best consideration date of December 20<sup>th</sup>. The posting received five applicants. One did not meet minimum qualifications and one when contacted indicated that they did not apply. The search committee reviewed the remaining 3 applicants. During the process one of the applicant took another position and another one withdrew which left 1 applicant. The posting was extended an additional month through June 8<sup>th</sup> and received 1 more applicant that could not meet the minimum requirements. With 1 applicant remaining it was decided by leadership that with recent events such as COVID challenges a change in leadership for SOM, and the small applicant pool it was decided to close the position and repost in a few months in the hopes that there would be a larger applicant pool. The board and search committee was notified. The next steps will be to revisit the qualifications of the posting, and revisit the search committee membership for the next posting.

**9. Public Comment**

No public comment

**10. Vote to close general meeting and proceed in executive session**

Dr. Roth called to close the general meeting and proceed in executive session. Sec. Kunkel **MOVED**, Chief Johnson **SECONDED**. The general meeting was closed by rollcall of all present members. All were in favor. Motion **CARRIED**.

For the purpose of the close session, Dr. Roth announced that the following are permitted to stay for the executive session:

Heather Jarrell, MD

Nancy Joste, MD

Martha McGrew, MD

Stephanie Salazar

**11. Re-Open the General Meeting**

The general meeting was re-opened at 1:55 PM

The board discussed a letter received by Mr. Jose Villegas. The letter outlined his concerns of the way that the OMI stored decedents during the COVID-19 pandemic. Designee Stephanie Salazar, representing the NM Dept. of Indian Affairs stated that their agency also received the letter. Ms. Salazar said that Dept. of Indian Affairs responded to Mr. Villegas letting him know that they would bring it up to the OMI Board. Dr. Roth summarized Mr. Villegas concern; which is bodies stored at the OMI in the trailer coolers were not appropriately identified and/or tribal governments have not been notified that OMI is in possession of the bodies. Dr. Jarrell responded to Dr. Roth and explained the OMI process when a decedent is unidentified.

Decedents with a tentative ID that can't be identified with traditional methods like finger prints will be sent to the UTA/ FBI lab for DNA processing. The process is free of charge but the turnaround time can take a year to 18 months. Dr. Jarrell has identified an accredited lab at Oklahoma State University (OSU) where they can identify remains through DNA within a week. The cost for this lab is \$525 per case. Based on the number of these types of cases from previous years, it would cost the OMI 8K per year. Dr. Jarrell stated that the benefit of families waiting less time to find out if it is their love one is worth the cost to OMI. Since she has become the interim chief, she has implemented the new process to send DNA for all tentative unidentified cases to OSU. The true unknown unidentified cases will still be sent to UNT/FBI where they will be entered into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NAMUS).

Chief Johnson offered to sit in on a meeting with Mr. Villegas to address his concerns. Dr. Roth recommended that a meeting be arranged. The meeting will include Mr. Villegas, Chief Johnson and Dr. Jarrell

Designee Stephanie Salazar provided further clarification to the board regarding Mr. Villegas concern. He was concerned that Native Americans bodies were moved from the normal refrigerated area to the refrigerated trailers. Ms. Salazar agrees with the recommendation of the board to rely on Dr. Jarrell to respond to Mr. Villegas.

**12. Adjournment**

Dr. Roth asked the board if there was any other business to discuss. There was none. Dr. Roth asked for a motion to adjourn. Sec. Kunkel **MOVED**. Chief Johnson **SECONDED**. All were in favor. Motion **CARRIED**. The meeting **ADJOURNED** at 2:09 PM

Approval of Minutes:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Lynn Trujillo, Board Secretary

\_\_\_\_\_  
12/4/2020  
Date