Death Investigations and Public Health: Where’s the Connection?

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IDPH Quick Facts

- Approximately 450 employees
- 180 programs
- 6 divisions
- 19 professional licensing boards
- 4 “semi-independent” boards (medicine, pharmacy, nursing, and dental)
- Celebrated 125 year anniversary in 2005
IDPH’s Divisions

- Administration and Professional Licensure
- Acute Disease Prevention and Emergency Response
- Behavioral Health
- Environmental Health
- Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention
- Tobacco Use Prevention and Control
IDPH FY 2010 Budget

General Funds: $132,508,936
Health Care Trust: $52,351,373
State Stimulus: $6,530,175
Federal Funds: $3,000,000
Other Funds: $46,336,566
Iowa’s Public Health System

- Decentralized like other governmental functions in the state
- 100 locals boards of health
- LBOH – 5 member boards, one of which must be a licensed physician
- Approximately 1/3 of local health departments are hospital based
- Service delivery at local level with support from state (funding, policy, TA…)}
What does public health do?

Definition of public health #1:
"the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organized efforts and informed choices of society, organizations, public and private, communities and individuals..."

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_health
Definition of public health #2:

“The science and practice of community hygiene; includes preventive medicine, health education, sanitation and environmental safety.”

What does public health do?

Definition of public health #3:

“an effort organized by society to protect, promote, and restore the people’s health. Physicians treat one patient at a time; public health workers treat whole populations.”

http://www.jhsph.edu/publichealthexperts/Glossary.htm
Public Health in America

Public Health:
- Prevents epidemics and the spread of disease
- Protects against environmental hazards
- Prevents injuries
- Promotes and encourages healthy behaviors
- Responds to disasters and assists communities in recovery
- Assures the quality and accessibility of health services
Ten Essential Services

1) Monitor health status of the community
2) Diagnose and investigate health problems
3) Inform, educate, and empower people about health issues
4) Mobilize community partnerships and action to solve health problems
5) Develop policies and plans that support community health efforts
Ten Essential Services

6) Enforce laws and regulations
7) Link people to needed personal health services
8) Assure competent public and personal health workforce
9) Evaluate effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services
10) Research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems.
Monitor Health Status…

**IOSME and county medical examiners:**

- Play a critical role in assuring accurate reporting of vital statistics
- Actively participate in public health surveillance
- Assist in identifying threats to community health and/or specific groups within the community
Monitor Health Status…

Examples:

- Identification of a possible pattern of deaths among young children – worked closely w/epidemiologists to assess data
- FACE project – collaboration among IOSME, IDPH epidemiologists, and University of Iowa College of Public Health to investigate worksite fatalities
- Child Death Review Team
Diagnose and Investigate…

IOSME and county medical examiners:

- Contribute to the body of knowledge about patterns of infectious and chronic disease and injuries
- Work with other public health partners to investigate individual deaths which may be an indicator of a risk to the community
Diagnose and Investigate…

Examples:

- FACE project – worksite fatalities
- IOSME has worked closely with IDPH toxicologist to analyze data and determine risk
- H1N1 and other infectious disease reporting – epidemiologists and UHL
- Child Death Review Team
Inform, Educate, and Empower…

IOSME and county medical examiners:
- Educate public health practitioners, policy makers and law enforcement about causes and patterns of deaths
- Often called upon to work through the media to get out messages to protect the public’s health
Examples:

- Contribution to the *Vital Statistics of Iowa* and *Child Death Review Team Annual Report* publications
- Criminal testimony on causes and manners of death
- FACE project – worksite fatality reports
Develop Policies and Plans…

IOSME and county medical examiners:

- Assist in disaster planning around mass casualties
- Contribute to code and rule changes related to death reporting and certificates
- Determine when a death investigation and autopsy are appropriate as well as reporting forms used
Examples:

- IOSME assumed lead role in drafting Iowa’s mass casualty plan
- IOSME routinely works with Bureau of Health Statistics on rule and code changes related to death reporting
- IOSME responsible for updating Iowa Code Chapter 331, IAC 641-126, and IAC 641-127
IOSME and county medical examiners:
- Provide information that could be used to determine whether a company was not following workplace safety rules
- Play critical role in collecting evidence related to criminal cases and expert testimony
Enforce Laws and Regulations…

Examples:

- Work closely with law enforcement related to wrongful death cases
- FACE reports – used to inform policy and in some cases enforce rules and laws
- Death reporting and investigation (Iowa Code Chapter 331, IAC 641-126 and 641-127)
Assure a Competent…Workforce

Examples:

- IAC 641-127 “County Medical Examiners”
- Ongoing training provided by IOSME and Coverdale funding
- Annual conference
Evaluate Effectiveness…

Examples:
- National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) accreditation
- State performance measurement efforts
Concluding Thoughts

- Death investigations fit within the public health model
- IOSME and CMEs play a vital role in protecting the health of Iowans
- Potential for future collaborations between traditional public health programs and death investigators as both sides become more aware of what the other does
Thank you!