



Look what's inside

President's Message

2018 will be a noteworthy year for IACME . . . **2**

IACME elections

Three positions on the IACME Board are up for re-election . . . **2**

Iowa and the Great Pandemic

A look back at the nightmare 1918 flu season . . . **3**

FAQ — EDRS

Frequently asked questions about Electronic Death Registration . . . **4**

IACMEnews

Spring 2018

News from the Iowa Association of County Medical Examiners

Iowa physicians writing fewer opioid prescriptions

Physicians across the nation are changing prescribing patterns in response to the opioid crisis and a number of state laws aimed at curbing opioid use.

The IQVIA Institute for Human Data Science, which studies use of prescription drugs, found that prescriptions for opioids peaked in 2011 at 240 billion milligrams of morphine equivalents and have declined by 29 percent since then. The largest single annual decrease came in 2017 when opioid prescriptions decreased by 12 percent.

According to Jennifer Tiffany, head of the Iowa Board of Pharmacy Prescription Monitoring Program, Iowa physicians are part of the national trend.

“Last year, Iowa saw a 10 percent decrease in the number of dosage units and the number of total opioid prescribers,” she says.

continued on page 3

2018 Fall Meeting and Education Expo

Friday-Saturday, November 2-3
West Des Moines Marriott

Call 515.267.1500 for hotel reservations

**Hotel reservation deadline
October 11 - room rate \$114**

Watch your email for program details

Iowa's flu season the most severe in recent history

With twice the number of deaths as in 2017, Iowa just experienced one of its worst flu seasons in years.

“It doesn't compare with epidemics of the distant past such as 1918, but this year definitely saw the most flu deaths in quite awhile,” comments Patricia Quinlisk, MD, State Epidemiologist with the Iowa Department of Public Health. “The Influenza A we saw this year causes serious disease and affected the elderly in particular.”

According to the **Des Moines Register**, there were 135 flu deaths in Iowa in 2017. A May 5, 2018 report from the Iowa Influenza Surveillance Network (IISN) showed 267 flu deaths in Iowa this season. Hospitalizations and

continued on page 3

IACME Elections November 2

Annual IACME elections will be held Friday evening, November 2 at the West Des Moines Marriott in conjunction with the 2018 IACME Fall Meeting and Education Expo.

Three seats on the IACME Board of Directors are up for re-election this year. The seats are held by Gregory Schmunk, MD of Des Moines; Staci Olson, RN of Fort Dodge and Thomas Summitt, F-ABMDI of Muscatine. All three incumbents are seeking re-election to the Board.

Any IACME member interested in running for a Board seat should call IACME Executive Director Chris Sutton at 515.212.9685 or email her at iacmeservices@gmail.com. ▼

We salute counties with 100 percent IACME membership

Congratulations to the Iowa counties that achieved 100 percent membership in the Iowa Association of County Medical Examiners for 2018 – Cass, Cedar, Dallas, Dubuque, Jasper, Johnson, Muscatine, Polk, Pottawattamie, Scott, Webster and Woodbury. ▼

(If your county should be included but wasn't, please email Chris Sutton at iacmeservices@gmail.com.)

Future IACME Fall Meeting dates

Future dates of the IACME Fall Meeting and Education Expo were recently announced by the IACME Board of Directors. Please mark the dates below in your calendars.

2019 IACME Fall Meeting – Friday and Saturday, November 1-2, West Des Moines Marriott.

2020 IACME Fall Meeting – Friday and Saturday, November 6-7, West Des Moines Marriott.

2021 IACME Fall Meeting – Friday and Saturday, November 5-6, West Des Moines Marriott.

President's Message

by Sheila Holcomb, MD



The year 2018 will be noteworthy for Iowa. Counties will see a much overdue increase in autopsy fees to help defray costs at the state level, and the State Medical Examiner's Office will have a new forensic pathologist on staff. This pathologist will finally fill the vacancy left by our former Chief Medical Examiner, Dr. Julia Goodin, in 2016.

Current Chief Medical Examiner, Dr. Dennis Klein, along with Drs. Michele Catallier and Jonathan Thompson, have been working tirelessly since Dr. Goodin's departure. Their workload should ease this summer when the new pathologist begins.

All Iowans should be proud of the diligent work performed at the State Medical Examiner's Office, and we will welcome Dr. Kelly Cruz of Baltimore with open arms.

It is important to communicate with your county supervisors and fellow residents about the increase in autopsy fees. It's important for them to know that the autopsy fees have not increased since 2010. Considering the expertise and personnel needed for autopsies, the increase from \$1,400 to \$1,900 is nominal. IACME members and everyone involved with death investigations should defend the increase in fees if questioned. This increase allows our state to hire Dr. Cruz.

Remember, our Fall Meeting will be back at the West Des Moines Marriott November 2-3. Dr. Klein has put together a fascinating and informative slate of topics and speakers. I hope to see you all there. ▼

Dr. Holcomb is president of IACME and Plymouth County Medical Examiner. You can email her at sheila.holcomb@floydvalley.org.

ANNUAL MEETING
National Association of Medical Examiners
October 12-16, 2018

Hilton West Palm Beach • West Palm Beach, Florida

Opioid prescriptions declining, from page 1

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the seeds of today's opioid addiction crisis were sown in the 1990s when pharmaceutical companies assured the medical community that prescription painkillers were not addictive, and physicians began prescribing them at higher rates. In Iowa and other states, agencies that regulate physicians said physicians would face sanctions for failing to effectively control patients' pain.

Experts attribute the decrease in the number of opioid prescriptions to intense media coverage of the opioid crisis, regulatory and reimbursement policies and state legislation restricting opioid prescribing.

The bill bans paper prescriptions for opioids and requires that such prescriptions be sent electronically from clinics to pharmacies.

A growing number of states have passed measures to regulate opioid prescribing and, during its 2018 session, the Iowa Legislature approved a bill designed to reduce opioid abuse. In an attempt to reduce "doctor shopping," the bill requires physicians and other health care providers to check the Prescription Monitoring Program before prescribing opioids.

The bill also bans paper prescriptions for opioids and requires that such prescriptions be sent electronically from clinics to pharmacies. According to the Iowa Board of Pharmacy, 65 percent of prescriptions for non-addictive drugs written by Iowa providers are filed electronically, but only nine percent of prescriptions for opioids are handled electronically. Clinics have until January 1, 2020 to comply with this provision of the bill.

The Iowa legislation also provides legal protections for people who report an overdose and requires that physicians receive an annual report detailing how many addictive drugs they prescribed and comparing their prescribing patterns to peers.

The Iowa Board of Pharmacy supported the legislation. "We believe it will be an important component in finding our way out of the opioid crisis," says Jennifer Tiffany. "It will be one part of a multi-pronged approach." ▼

Iowa's flu season, from page 1

school absences also saw significant increases.

"This number is an underestimate of flu-related deaths," explains Dr. Quinlisk. "Consider the case of an elderly person who has influenza and then dies of pneumonia. Would that person have died of pneumonia if their immune system hadn't been compromised by the flu?"

A factor in the severity of the flu season was the fact that no nasal spray vaccine was available, which meant fewer children were vaccinated. Dr. Quinlisk says a nasal spray will be available for the next flu season. In addition, the flu vaccine given to most adults was reportedly only about 10 percent effective against the Influenza A strain that predominated this season.

"Vaccines must be developed months ahead, so trends are very difficult to predict," Dr. Quinlisk concludes. "but I believe a universal flu vaccine will be available in the next five years." ▼

Iowa and the Great Pandemic

On October 10, 1918 the city of Des Moines was placed under quarantine. The Board of Health voted to close churches, schools, theaters and other gathering places. At Camp Dodge directly north of the city, 3,000 soldiers had fallen ill with a deadly strain of Influenza A (H1N1) known as Spanish Flu. Soldiers weren't allowed to leave, but Camp Dodge was under construction and workers came and went from the city on a daily basis.

State law didn't allow mandatory quarantines of influenza cases, but officials hoped a voluntary quarantine would reduce the potential number of cases. Though Iowa physicians correctly argued that masks did little to prevent spread of the virus, the Board of Health issued a recommendation that all residents wear masks while in public.

It was already too late. Within a week of the quarantine, more than 8,100 new cases of flu were reported. The following week, over 21,000 cases were diagnosed. The pandemic peaked in late December and gathering places were re-opened. No one knows the exact number of deaths, but it was in the hundreds and possibly the thousands.

Electronic Death Registration System—FAQs

The EDRS was launched in 2014 as part of the Iowa Vital Event System (IVES); 470 Medical Examiners and ME staff are registered in the system. These FAQs were compiled by Sandra Lyles, field representative with the Iowa Department of Public Health. If you have a question not answered here, or you'd like to update your user account information, contact the IVES help desk at iveshelpdesk@idph.iowa.gov or 866.309.0831.

Will county recorders accept paper death certificates?

No. Paper death certificates are no longer used except for fetal deaths. If the local vital records office receives a paper death, the recorder's office will contact the funeral home and instruct them to complete the record in EDRS.

Is EDRS training available for medical examiners?

Webinars and user manuals are available under **Help Menu**. A new online training for Cause of Death Reporting in Iowa was just released in May. This training can be viewed at <https://ives.training-source.org/>

How can I find a record that isn't in my work queue?

If you completed a record and need to retrieve it, go to the top of the screen and select >>**Search** >>**Death**. When the new window opens, type the decedent's name and date of death. Click **Search** at the bottom. All records with that name that have been assigned to you will be displayed.

Why do I get an error when I "skip or override" a field?

All required fields must have a value entered. Skipped fields must be corrected before a record can be signed. Users can override information if they are satisfied with the value entered and it meets their criteria. To move forward and eliminate the pop-up, the user must select "**Queried and Verified**". Selecting this option allows the data to be saved and the record can be signed. All overrides are reviewed by the state office.

When do I "save" a record?

It is a good practice to "**Save**" or "**Save without Edits**" before you move to the signature tab. This ensures your record gets saved and email notifications are sent at the right time.

How can I remove a selection for a Cremation Permit?

You must clear out the ME name. Tab to the field and click the **Delete** key. This will clear the value from the field. Remember, the EDRS Cremation Permit is an optional feature; some medical examiners don't use them. Check with your county ME to ensure they are using the EDRS for cremation permits.

Where can I find the "Save without Edits" function?

From the top of the screen, select >>**File** >>**Save Without Edits**.

Can I reassign a death record?

Certifiers and staff can reassign the death record to a different certifier. Select the **Certifier** tab. In the Certifier section, make sure the Certifier Type is correct (i.e. Advanced Practitioner, Certifying Physician, Medical Examiner, Physician Assistant). Select the new certifier from the drop-down list, click **Save**. Remember, records assigned to a medical examiner can only be reassigned by another medical examiner.

Can I make a correction to a death record before it is filed with the State?

Yes. From the top of the screen, select >>**Search** >>**Death**>> and type in the decedent's first and last name. Open the record, go to the Signature tab. Change the "Y" to "N" in the Certifier field, then change the "Y" to "N" in the Medical Information Complete field. This will unlock the fields so changes can be made. Save the record and re-sign the signature fields.

Can I correct a death record after it has been filed with the state?

Yes. Submit your request to death registration staff on business letterhead. The signed request for changes should be faxed to 515.281.0479.

2018 IACME Board of Directors

PRESIDENT
Sheila Holcomb, MD
LeMars

VICE PRESIDENT
Kevin Locke, MD
Decorah

SECRETARY-TREASURER
Julie Breiner, MD
Sioux City

PAST PRESIDENT
Thomas Carroll, MD, PhD
Sioux City

BOARD MEMBER
Dennis Crabb, MD
Denison

BOARD MEMBER
Dennis Firchau, MD
Iowa City

BOARD MEMBER
Barbara Harre, MD
Davenport

BOARD MEMBER
Paul Jensen, MD, PharmD
Cresco

BOARD MEMBER
Staci Olson, MSN, RN
Fort Dodge

BOARD MEMBER
Gregory Schmunk, MD
Des Moines

BOARD MEMBER
Thomas Summitt, D-ABMDI
Muscatine

EX OFFICIO BOARD MEMBERS
Michele Catellier, MD
Dennis Klein, MD
Jonathan Thompson, MD
Iowa Office of the
State Medical Examiner

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Chris Sutton

**DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION
AND FINANCE**
Cheri Jensen

**Iowa Association of
County Medical Examiners**

PO Box 274
Boone, IA 50036
515.212.9685
iacmeservices@gmail.com
www.iacountyme.org