

DMA on Deceased Patients

Goal and Objective

- **Goal:** To evaluate Roane County's transportation policies and procedures of deceased persons. To further evaluate Roane County's policies and procedures for ordering autopsies.
- **Objective:**
 - Assess and compare Roane County's policies and procedures for compliance with state law and other counties' policies and procedures.
 - To help determine if Roane County's policies are aligned with state law and regional conventions.
 - Further to make recommendations and/or modifications if deem necessary.

Methodology

- Review Tennessee Code Annotated (TCA)
- Review Roane County's policies and procedures
- Review Roane County's Rescue Squad's policies and procedures
- Review of Roane County's Emergency Medical Services' data
- Survey/Discussion with various counties' policies and procedures
- Interview/Discussion with funeral home directors
- Interview/Discussion with Roane County's medical examiner

Findings

- Several T.C.A. Codes address procedures for handling deceased persons and the manner in which they died.
 - **TCA 38-7-108. Death under suspicious, unusual or unnatural circumstances**
 - **TCA 38-7-109. Investigation by county medical examiner**
 - **TCA 68-4-102. Disposition of unclaimed bodies of persons dying in charitable or penal institutions or to be buried at public expense**
 - **TCA 38-7-104 County Medical Examiner**
 - **TCA 8-9-101 County Coroner**

Policies

- A detailed review of existing policies was conducted
- The Following Policies were reviewed:
 - Roane County OES-EMS Division Deceased Patient Transportation Policy
 - Roane County Volunteer Rescue Squads Policy on Transportation of Deceased Persons
 - Policies of the following surrounding counties:
 - Anderson, Cumberland, Meigs, Rhea

Funeral Homes

- Kyker, Evans, and Click Funeral Homes were interviewed and asked about their functions
- Several commonalities were found:
 - Funeral homes routinely respond to hospitals, nursing homes, and residences and transport bodies from the scene of the death to the funeral home.
 - Funeral homes maintain on call staff for transportation of deceased.
 - Funeral homes do charge for this service.
 - Funeral homes more often than not start the embalming/cremation process without a signed death certificate.
 - Funeral homes pay for the expense of indigent customers.

Medical Examiner Comments

- None to Date

Conclusion

- Criminal investigations of deaths are delegated to local law enforcement, the district attorney, and the medical examiner
- T.C.A. does not address transportation of deceased persons.
- While performing research into this subject matter and comparing the RCOES Deceased Patient Transport Policy to that of other agencies it was determined that most do not have a written policy. Furthermore the Tennessee Code Annotated does not provide guidance on this matter.
- Most counties allow the funeral homes to transport deceased patients from the scene to the funeral home or other desired location.

Conclusion

- The mortuary services industry transports deceased patients as an industry standard.
- Roane County Office of Emergency Services EMS does not transport deceased patients for autopsy due to the time required to perform this task. The Roane County Rescue Squad transports deceased patients to the University of Tennessee Forensic Center for autopsy.
- Roane County Office of Emergency Services EMS does transports deceased patients to Roane Medical Center when there are adequate ambulances available.
- Ambulances and rescue squad vehicles and staff should not be used for transportation of the deceased due to the funeral home industry providing this service as an industry standard, unless TCA 38-7-108 is invoked.
- The Roane County Medical Examiner should develop written internal policy/procedure for the release of the deceased to the funeral homes for transport. This will allow critical emergency resources to remain available for their primary mission of life safety.

Conclusion

- The Roane County Medical Examiner should develop written internal standard operating policy/procedures for the operations of the office to include when an autopsy should be ordered pursuant to TCA 38-7-108 and define the functions the office of Medical Examiner provides.
- TCA stipulates that the County Commission is charged with the appointment of the Medical Examiner and thus implies commission responsibility related to policies of the Medical Examiner Office