

Dear members,

As I sit here at my computer writing to you, I find myself thinking about the changes that have taken place in my own life over the past four years. Some have been good, and opened up exciting new opportunities. Some, like the closing of our local GM factory, have been beyond my control and I can only help my family plan for the future. I don't know what my life will look like in another four years, but I can plan and prepare in the hopes of a brighter tomorrow.

The field of medicolegal death investigation (MLDI) and our Association also face a changing future. The National Academy of Sciences issued a report this year that included a recommendation to make major changes in the national death investigation system. Part of that recommendation included "replacing and eventually eliminating existing coroner systems". The report also notes the "shortage of resources and lack of consistent educational and training requirements" and the need for improvements in accreditation and adherence to standards. Regardless of your feelings about the qualifications of coroners vs. medical examiners or the politics of the National Association of Medical Examiners, the NAS report heralds major change for us all and we must prepare for it.

For those of us dependent on a county budget, the situation on the ground is grim. The state budget shortfall has required counties to cut costs, and coroner and medical examiner offices have historically been poorly budgeted to begin with. We will be asked to make do with less, and money for training will be an easy target for the budget chopping block. Since we also face some belt tightening at home, out-of-pocket MLDI training dollars will be hard to come by. How do we meet our needs for professional training and maintain standards in our offices?

As most of you know, the WCMEA has been promoting legislation to revise s.979 which defines our duties and responsibilities as medicolegal death investigators. The bill also proposes the creation of a Board on Medicolegal Investigations to establish training and testing requirements for coroners and medical examiners. The WCMEA has been working proactively to identify and meet the training needs of our members. We have offered opportunities at two conferences for members to take the ABMDI certification examination. We awarded two \$600 training scholarships at our June conference. Recent conferences have focused on a variety of topics and hands-on training labs to help our members learn new skills and sharpen competencies. Our website has grown to include resources and educational material. The board of directors and the education committee are exploring options for affordable computer-based training programs for our members, which could lay the groundwork for mandatory training in the future.

I believe that coroners and medical examiners are professionals who perform a unique and valuable service to our citizens. As president I will continue to promote education for our members, because I believe that training and certification is the pathway to the professional recognition we deserve. We face a future in our profession that is rife with change and opportunity. Some of us will rise to the challenge and therefore be prepared when the MLDI system in Wisconsin changes. Some will retire rather than conform to a new system with new expectations. Each of us must do what we can to promote our profession and prepare our offices for the future. The WCMEA is our collective voice in that effort. Together we can create opportunity in the face of the changes to come.

Jenifer Keach, Rock County Coroner