

The Pathology Group, P.C.

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FORENSICS 2019 ANNUAL REPORT

This report provides a summary and statistical analysis of the deaths that underwent autopsy by The Pathology Group, P.C. (TPG) in the year 2019. TPG is a private corporation that performs autopsies and provides other forensic services. Colorado is a “Coroner state” meaning each county elects a Coroner to oversee their counties medicolegal death investigation system.

Mesa County is the largest county in Western Colorado. Mesa County encompasses an area over 3300 square miles, which consists of desert, agricultural, and mountain areas. Mesa County is home to approximately 150,100 people in 12 communities. The largest of these is Grand Junction, followed by Fruita and Palisade. Other counties that use the services of TPG include the majority of those in Western CO including Garfield (pop. ~60k), Moffat (pop. ~13k) and Rio Blanco (pop. ~6k). Delta (pop. ~30k) and Montrose (pop. ~42k) also use the services of TPG when their primary pathologist is unavailable.

The Coroner’s Office for each county investigates sudden, unexpected deaths, especially those that occur under violent or suspicious circumstances. Those deaths to be reported to each county’s Coroner’s Office include the following:

- From disease which may be hazardous or contagious or which may constitute a threat to the health of the general public
- From external violence, an unexplained cause, or under suspicious circumstances
- Where no physician is in attendance, or where, though in attendance, the physician is unable to certify the cause of death
- From thermal, chemical, or radiation injury
- From criminal abortion
- While in the custody of law enforcement officials or while incarcerated in a public institution
- When the death was sudden and happened to a person who was in good health
- From an industrial accident or any death suspected to involve the decedent’s occupation
- When death occurs in a hospital less than 24 hours after admission to a hospital or after any invasive procedure
- Any death suspected to be due to alcohol intoxication or the result of exposure to drugs or toxic agents
- Any death due to neglect or suspected neglect
- Any stillbirth of 20 or more weeks gestational age unattended by a physician
- Any maternal death to include death of a pregnant woman regardless of the length of the pregnancy, and up to six weeks (or one year) post-delivery, even where the cause of death is unrelated to the pregnancy
- Any death of an infant or child where the medical history has not established a significant pre-existing condition

TPG Staff

Dean Havlik, M.D., Forensic Pathologist (full time pathologist and president of TPG)

Brent Davis, M.D., Forensic Pathologist (part time pathologist who covers for DH)

Chuck Nelson, D-ABMDI, medicolegal death investigator and autopsy technician

Ginger Sprague, autopsy technician

Amber Pruitt, autopsy technician

Number of postmortem examinations

Total examinations: 263

Complete Autopsies: 256

Partial Autopsies: 4

Brain removal only: 3

External Examinations: 0

Examinations by pathologists

Dean Havlik, MD: 241 complete autopsies; 4 partial autopsies; 3 brain removals

Brent Davis, MD: 15 complete autopsies; 0 partial autopsies; 0 brain removals

Examinations by county/hospital/private

Mesa: 140

Garfield: 67

Moffat: 25

Rio Blanco: 9

Delta: 6

Montezuma: 2

Montrose: 1

Gunnison: 1

Ouray: 1

Hospital (Community): 2

Hospital (VA): 1

Private: 8

Toxicology

Toxicology performed in 238 out of 263 cases

Community Hospital: 98

Axis: 138

Community Hospital and Axis: 2

Gender

Males: 191

Females: 72

Race

Caucasian: 242
 Hispanic: 16
 Native American: 2
 Black: 2
 Asian: 1

Age

0-19 years old: 17
 20-39 years old: 74
 40-59 years old: 106
 >60 years old: 66

In the 0 to 19 years old age group there were 17 deaths, which included 12 males and 5 females. Of these, 4 were natural deaths, 4 were suicides, 7 were accidents, 1 was a homicide and 1 had an undetermined cause and manner of death. The 4 suicide deaths included 3 deaths from hanging and 1 from a gunshot wound of the head. The homicide death was from chloroform poisoning. The 7 accidental deaths included 1 infant positional asphyxia death from an unsafe sleep environment, 1 drowning death, 1 thermal burns-related death, 1 death from acute alcohol intoxication and the other 3 deaths were from blunt force injuries. The undetermined death involved a 2 year old male who was found unresponsive at home and taken to the hospital where he remained for 10 days before being pronounced dead from anoxic brain injury. The autopsy and investigation did not reveal a distinct cause and manner of death.

Manner of death

	All deaths	Mesa	Garfield	Moffat	Others
Natural	74	24	21	9	20
Accident	101	59	24	9	9
Suicide	74	46	20	6	2
Homicide	10	9	1	0	0
Undetermined	4	2	1	1	0

Suicide deaths (74 total deaths)

Type	Number of deaths
Gunshot/shotgun wounds	44
Drug intoxications	5
Hanging/ligature strangulation	20
Other	5

The following are some general features of the suicide deaths:

- 66 males and 8 females
- Males ranged from 16 to 86 years of age and included the following:
 - Gunshot/shotgun wound – 40 deaths
 - Drug intoxication – 3 deaths
 - Hanging/ligature strangulation - 19 deaths
 - Other (incised wounds, blunt force injuries (2), nitrogen gas poisoning) – 4 deaths
- Females ranged from 12 to 76 years of age and included the following:
 - Gunshot/shotgun wounds - 4 deaths
 - Drug intoxication – 2 deaths
 - Hanging – 1 deaths
 - Asphyxia due to plastic bag over head – 1 death

Accidental Deaths (101 total deaths)

Type	Number of deaths
Blunt force injuries	36
Drugs and/or alcohol intoxication	44
Drowning	10
Thermal injuries/smoke inhalation	4
Electrocution	2
Other	7

Of the blunt force injury deaths, the majority were related to motor vehicles (25 deaths) and the majority of the others were primarily from falls from standing height.

Homicide deaths (10 total deaths)

- 6 males and 4 females
- Age range of 9 years old to 58 years old
- 7 deaths due to gunshot and/or shotgun wounds
- 2 deaths related to stab wounds
- 1 death related to chloroform poisoning (9 year old; only child homicide in 2019)

Natural deaths (74 total deaths)

Of the 74 natural deaths that underwent postmortem examination, a large portion of the deaths were cardiovascular related (35 deaths). Deaths due to cardiovascular causes include myocardial infarcts (heart attacks), heart arrhythmias, strokes and aneurysms. The next most common natural disease process resulting in death were from complications of chronic alcoholism (11 deaths). There were 8 deaths related to infectious causes (predominantly pneumonia in elderly individuals). One of these infectious related deaths was of a young man who had Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome. The remaining deaths were from varying natural disease processes.

Undetermined deaths (4 total deaths)

- 75 year old man whose cause of death was gunshot wound of the chest; undetermined manner of death (accidental death while cleaning gun vs. suicide)
- 2 year old male who was found unresponsive at home and hospitalized for 10 days (undetermined cause and manner of death)
- 36 year old woman previously healthy found dead in motel room (undetermined cause and manner of death after extensive studies performed including cardiac genetic studies)
- 54 year old man who underwent repair of splenic laceration in the hospital and then later died; cause of death was complications of splenic laceration (undetermined manner of death due to unclear circumstances on how the injury occurred)

Additional Information:

Unidentified bodies: 0

Bodies brought to facility: 490

Organ or tissue donation: 19

Unclaimed bodies: 0

Exhumations: 0