

MILTON HELPERN LAUREATE AWARD



THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MEDICAL EXAMINERS

The National Association of Medical Examiners began, as many great organizations do, from the dreams, ideas and wisdom of a few farsighted, socially conscious individuals. Back in 1965, Milton Helpern recognized the need for the nation's Medical Examiners to share their knowledge, expertise and experience in order to improve the medicolegal investigation of death in this country.

He discussed this concept with Richard Childs, the Executive Director of the National Municipal League, and a group of his close colleagues, Ali Hameli, Chief Medical Examiner, State of Delaware, Leslie Lukash, Chief Medical Examiner, Nassau County, New York, and Joseph Spellman, Chief Medical Examiner, City of Philadelphia. In the spring of 1966, these individuals formed a planning committee in order to bring Doctor Helpern's concept to reality. This group became the foundation and heart of what was later to become the National Association of Medical Examiners.

Through the dedication and efforts of these five men, N.A.M.E. was incorporated in August 1966. Subsequently they invited Chief Medical Examiners throughout the country to meet in Doctor Helpern's Office. As a result of that meeting, an interim steering board was formed which later paved the way for the first annual membership meeting held at the Knickerbocker Hotel in Chicago in February 1968.

JEFFREY M. JENTZEN, M.D.



The Executive Committee and Board of Directors of the National Association of Medical Examiners is extremely pleased to present the Milton Helpern Laureate Award to Jeffrey M. Jentzen, M.D. who has made outstanding contributions to the development and improvement of medicolegal investigations in the United States; who is highly respected by his colleagues for the highest excellence in forensic pathology, education, research, consultation and administration; and who has attained and is a living example of the principles, standards, and goals of the National Association of Medical Examiners.



Dr. Jentzen grew up in Ypsilanti, Michigan Southeast Michigan, home of the Willow Run Bomber Plant, “The Arsenal of Democracy.” I was active in sports at Ypsilanti High School and a late-bloomer academically. I attended Michigan Technological University on a football and wrestling scholarship majoring in pre-med. In Houghton I met and married Dorianne Otto, the daughter of a pathologist! We have two children, Nicole and Kaitlin and four grandchildren.

I have been active in NAME for over thirty years in a number of positions including president in 2007. Dorianne was also very active over the years in supporting Mary Fran Ernst and Denise McNally during the annual NAME meetings.

Unsuccessful at my first attempt to medical school, I attended the Autonomous University in Guadalajara Mexico for two years before transferring to Wayne State University in Detroit. This international exposure would stimulate my international interests in the coming years. After medical school, I completed a flexible internship in Ann Arbor before traveling to Minneapolis for a pathology residency at Hennepin County Medical Center.

I entered the anatomic and clinical pathology residency at Hennepin County Medical Center in Minneapolis with the intention of being a general pathologist in the mold of my father-in-law. Dr. John Coe was the chairman of pathology at Hennepin County Medical Center and medical examiner for Hennepin County. I was reluctant, at first, to enter the forensic fellowship; however, I changed my mind after medical reimbursements changed in the early 1980s there were few jobs available in general pathology. Coe accepted me into the forensic fellowship with the simple words, “You’re tall enough!” Coe retired as medical examiner the year preceding my fellowship and I was Garry Peterson’s first fellow.

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During the 1980s, Minneapolis contained one of the most dynamic groups of forensic pathologists in the country and I was fortunate to train there. There was a strong emphasis on forensic toxicology and teaching in forensic pathology. John Coe was active nationally including his involvement in the Kennedy and King Assassination investigations. His annual forensic conference brought the top people in the field to Minneapolis to lecture. Coe was of course known for his work in vitreous fluid analysis helped to a large degree by his access to the hospital lab and Calvin Bandt. Dr. Calvin “Cal” Bandt was the unsung force behind the scenes. He was a board-certified forensic pathologist and supervised and ran the clinical labs at Hennepin County Medical Center. He was the one of the first to recognize the phenomenon of postmortem drug re-distribution.

Garry Peterson MD, JD took over as medical examiner in 1984 following Coe. I became the assistant medical examiner for six months until I left for Milwaukee in 1987 to take the medical examiner job. I became the Medical Examiner for Milwaukee County in 1987, at age thirty-three, one of the youngest medical examiners of a major American city at the time. I intended to stay in Milwaukee for a short time, but quickly fell in love with the city. My later success in Milwaukee was to a large degree because of the almost weekly telephone conversations, “sessions” I had with Garry during the early years of my career, right out of training.

I spent the major part of my career in Milwaukee where I was the medical examiner for twenty-one years before retiring in 2008. The office was staffed with hard-working professionals. My first accomplishment was to recruit Dr. John Teggatz as the Deputy Chief medical examiner. John, who also completed his pathology residency and fellowship training with me at Hennepin County, was a dedicated colleague and friend until his untimely death from cancer.

The toxicology laboratory in Milwaukee was especially prominent. Susan Gock was the toxicologist most responsible for the excellent service and reputation of the lab. Steve Wong, Ph.D., came to Milwaukee in the mid-1990s and provided academic foundation for many of the publications and developed a forensic toxicology fellowship program. Steve developed one of the first forensic pharmacogenomics laboratory (the study of genetic influence on drug deaths) and did extensive work in the field. I have been fortunate to work with dedicated managers, staff and fellows.

In Milwaukee, I was extremely fortunate to have a supportive district attorney and a number of local physicians in the local Milwaukee community who understood the importance of the role of the medical examiner. Over the years we developed child death review teams, a regional medical examiner system with coroners, co-operative relationships with organ and tissue agencies, and public health authorities, and continued the annual two-day forensic seminar similar to those in Hennepin County. The highest profile case I handled was the Jeffrey Dahmer serial killing (1991). Although it received a lot of publicity, it was really more like dismantling a museum. During my time in Milwaukee, I handled a number of other major incidents including, the 1995 Heat Wave Disaster, 2008 Lake Michigan airplane crash, and a number of industrial accidents, serial killers and public health epidemics.

I believe my most lasting accomplishments to the field have been in the area of death investigator education. Certainly, the best thing I ever did professionally was to interest Dr. Steve Clark, a PhD., an educator, curriculum and testing expert in the field of death investigation. Steve is my boyhood friend. The result was a training manual, *The Medicolegal Death Investigator: A Systematic Training Program for the Professional Death Investigator* and development national forensic autopsy standards, which eventually developed into the American Board of Medico-Legal Death Investigation (ABMDI). Since that early project, Steve has made a number of contributions to NAME and forensic medicine including: National Guidelines for Death Investigation and Crime Scene Investigation, certification examinations, NAMUS program for missing and unidentified persons, forensic specialty certification and computerizing the NAME Inspection and Accreditation process and a number of other research programs in death investigation.

I relocated to the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor in 2008 as the Director of Autopsy and Forensic Pathology and Washtenaw County medical examiner. The leadership of the department sought to develop a forensic center of excellence. We eventually embedded the local ME office into the department of pathology. Seeking to develop a forensic fellowship, in 2011 the department took over the responsibility of administering the Wayne County (Detroit)

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medical examiner office under Dr. Carl Schmidt. Another local county was added in 2017. The result has been the creation of a regional, academically based medical examiner system in southeast Michigan.

One of my major areas of interest include, medical history. In 2007, after ten years of study, I earned a PhD in the history science from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The result was the publication, *Death Investigation in America: Coroners, Medical Examiners, and the Search for Reasonable Medical Certainty*, a history of forensic pathology in America during the twentieth century. I have published a number of papers and chapters on the history of death investigation including a forthcoming book, *Instruments of Empire: A Global History of Death Investigation in the Colonial Perspective*.

Medical examiners need special skills and gifts of patience, suspicion, paranoia, and common sense. They need to be public servants that know how to avoid perceptions of conflicts of interest. I learned how to be a public servant from my father Harold, a county engineer, and how to practice medicine from my father-in-law Howard Otto, a pathologist. Over my career, I have developed a number of practices, which I believe would be beneficial advice for forensic pathologists entering the field for forensic medicine.

- The autopsy begins at the scene.
- No guts; no glory. (Make a decision)
- No good deed goes unpunished. (Treat everyone the same.)
- Get your butt out of bed! (Go to crime scenes)
- The chief has to spend time in the autopsy room.
- You don't know how much authority you have until you try and use it.
- The statutes won't save you, use common sense.
- Speak to politicians like you visit with your neighbor over the back fence.
- Always do a complete autopsy.
- Specialize in something.
- If you think about it; Do it!

I am truly humbled and grateful for this Award and the support of my colleagues. I will continue to encourage and extoll the benefits of quality death investigative practices across the country.