INTRODUCTION FROM DR. GLENN WAGNER

Welcome to the San Diego County Medical Examiner's Office report on its 2010 activities. The statistics and scope of activities reflect ever changing patterns of disease and trauma in public health and safety within our community. The scope of activities of the Medical Examiner's Office is largely based on Government Code 26491 which states that all unnatural deaths including homicides, suicides, accidents, deaths in custody are by definition coroner/medical examiner cases as well as infectious diseases reaching epidemic proportions, deaths in state institutions, and deaths believed to be natural but sudden and unexpected where the decedent has not seen their health care provider in the last 20 days of life. For San Diego County with a land mass of 4,200 square miles, 90 miles of border, 70 miles of coastline, and a diverse geography including deserts, mountains, forests, mesas and coastal areas and an equally diverse population of some 3.2 million with between 19,000-21,000 deaths recorded each year, the Medical Examiner's Office investigates some 10,000 cases annually or approximately 840 cases/month.

Not all of those cases are brought to its new 55,000 square foot facility in Kearny Mesa at the County's Operations Center. Approximately 7,400 cases reported and investigated by the Medical Examiner's Office are ultimately waived as sudden unexpected natural deaths. In these cases, the decedent's healthcare provider will sign the death certificate. Some 3,000 cases are brought to the facility for further evaluation with a relative constant proportion of cases. For 2010, we saw 36% natural deaths (heart attacks, cancer, diabetes, strokes, liver and kidney failure), 45% accidents (prescription drug, motor vehicle, industrial/agriculture, home based), 14% suicides, 3.3% homicides and 1.2% undetermined.

Largely based on its geographic position and diverse population, the Medical Examiner's Office investigates the deaths of some 200-300 John and Jane Does representing a population composed of illegal immigrants, homeless, individuals living under an alias, or simply dying without identification. Using photographs, fingerprints, dental records, general X-ray comparison, personal effects, and DNA testing, the nationally acclaimed John/Jane Doe Center identifies approximately 97% of its John and Jane Does. The Medical Examiner's Bereavement Center, also nationally acclaimed, brings together a large number of community resources to assist the families of decedents falling with the scope of the Medical Examiner's Office.

It is the intent of the Medical Examiner's Office to be more than the "County Morgue" by developing as much information on every case as resources permit and to study those cases in

cohorts that reflect or are likely to reflect changing patterns important to public health and safety as well as risk factors for premature accessions.

The dead do have a story to tell – not only of death but life, and we, the living, have an obligation to listen to that story and perhaps, just perhaps, learn something about ourselves and our community.

Glenn N. Wagner, D.O.

Chief Medical Examiner