CASE REPORT REQUESTS AND DATA SHARING

We work hard to investigate deaths throughout the county, and it is critical that we communicate to those that need it the details of our investigation, our findings, and our conclusions as to cause and manner of death. Our most important documents are the autopsy, toxicology, and investigative reports we generate, and it is essential that we distribute these reports in a timely fashion to those who request them after the completion of our investigations.

According to California Law, the reports we generate are public record. We receive between 3,500-4,000 requests for reports per year from a wide variety of people and agencies, including family members, friends, hospitals, law firms, insurance companies, and government agencies. Our clerical department completes this task in a timely fashion, while also handling phone calls and emails, helping visitors and mortuaries, and performing innumerable other duties throughout the day. We charge a nominal $0.20 per page to all except family members. Historically, we have filled 95% of these requests in 7 days or less. 2010 saw an increase in the amount of time to fill report requests, with 86% of the requests being filled within 7 days. The loss of student workers due to budget constraints was likely the major factor in our not meeting this performance measure in 2010.

In addition to examining individual deaths, we also examine each death as part of a larger group over months or years to identify trends, patterns and specific details in the types of deaths that can shed light on emerging public health concerns. We receive queries from media, government agencies, federal and local law enforcement agencies, and the general public on a regular basis regarding a variety of subjects. Threading our information with other agencies and law enforcement can produce a more complete understanding of public health issues and potentially lead to intervention or policy changes to address them.