

Concerning the Toxicology Department at the Office of the Medical Examiner.

The toxicology department at the Office of the Medical Examiner has been a vital and key component of the Medical Examiner's Office since its inception in the 1970's. The department performs numerous forensic tests and assays that give insight for pathologists who use this information to determine cause of death. The department, through the years, has done reliable and consistent work. Individual toxicologists gain knowledge as well as experience doing these tests and assays. This type of experience in forensics cannot be gained working outside a toxicology laboratory setting. By closing the lab you are, in our opinion, risking the chance of subtle deviations in the quality of work. This, in turn, can lead to questionable results and a deterioration in forensic integrity.

Forensic testing is different from medical testing. The samples are not as 'pristine' as samples from living patients. The reference lab technician, who will have little experience with forensic samples, may not know what to look for in these sample types. Additionally the methodology used will be designed for non forensic samples. Calibration of instrumentation may, or may not, use matrix's that would be considered proper for forensic samples. Currently the toxicology lab can perform tests, using the correct matrix, on a variety of samples – Kidney, Spleen, Liver, Brain.... Will a reference lab use the same care with the variety of samples currently being tested in house?

Looking back through the years (1984-2014) we have seen the laboratory perform a diligent service for the people of Cook County. With onsite, experienced workers, the laboratory is ready to perform any test, answer any question from in house doctors and administrators, as well as Cook County residents who would call during a sensitive and often traumatic time of their lives. Toxicologists understand the need for professionalism and courtesy when dealing with the bereaved. Pride in doing the job right was always a major objective of the Toxicology Dept. Peer review of all work performed gave an experienced second look, ensuring the quality of work being produced.

It is our humble opinion that the best option for both the Office of the Medical Examiners and the people of Cook County would be to maintain the Department of Toxicology. If the true objective of the Medical Examiner is to administer justice and protect public health, then the need for a Toxicology Department is self evident. The true cost of losing the department cannot be measured in dollars and cents. The human factor must be factored into the equation. The care and expertise of in house forensic toxicologists is too vital to lose, and may be too costly in the end.

Kathleen A Mittel – Toxicologist 1985-2014, Lab Supervisor 2008-2010



James R Reich Jr – Toxicologist 1984-2014

