



William Pellan, Director of Investigations,
District 6 Medical Examiner's Office

Photo by Dennis Eckel

From: Rotary Club of Clearwater
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At a recent meeting of the Rotary Club of Clearwater William Pellan, Director of Forensic Investigations gave a phenomenal glimpse into the workings of the Medical Examiner's Office. Pinellas and Pasco counties combine to form the 6th Judicial District. Each district has a Medical Examiner, there are no coroners in the state of Florida. A medical examiner is a Medical Doctor with further training and specialization in Pathology. Other areas of the country may utilize coroners, these are appointed political figures that may or may not have any background in medicine or pathology. Our own district 6 is one of only 4 districts in Florida that is accredited by the National Association of Medical Examiners. The medical examiner is appointed to a 3-year term by the Governor and funded by the counties that they serve. Our District 6 is publicly funded but privately contracted, resulting in a model of efficiency.

The Medical Examiner's Office investigates all violent, sudden or unexpected deaths. Our ME serves as a witness to the dead and spends much time in court. The ME assists law enforcement with investigations, injury interpretation and identification. Information is provided to insurance and government organizations such as the division of Consumer and Product Safety. They are not involved with malpractice, standard of care issues or civil suits as that would conflict with their role as a public agency. In 2009 there were 16,946 deaths in District 6, 1,849 were cases for the ME's office. In comparing the number of violent deaths; Miami-Dade County had 1406 while Pinellas County had only slightly less at 1352. It is important to note that "violent death" includes accident, homicide, suicide or undetermined. Certainly there are more homicides in Miami-Dade than Pinellas/Pasco Counties. In comparing the number of violent deaths in District 6 (1352) with budget (\$3.85M) and that of Miami-Dade (1406) with their budget of (\$9.26M), it is easy to see that a phenomenally efficient job is provided. Our District 6 has the lowest cost per case and autopsy among Florida's major metropolitan areas.

Accidental drug overdose is a growing problem particularly in Pinellas County. Pinellas County has more direct drug related deaths than any other county including Miami-Dade. Another staggering figure is the fact that Pinellas County has nearly TWICE as many deaths due to prescription drug overdose than traffic fatalities.