Coronial Services Centre Open Day, Thursday 3 August 2006

Jackie Sullivan

The Coronial Services Open Day was attended by a group of professionals from across the clinical and nursing spectrum of the health industry. The intimate nature of the gathering enabled participants to be directly involved in discussions on a range of topics presented by the Clinical Liaison Service (CLS), in conjunction with the State Coroner's Office (SCO) and the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (VIFM).

We started the day in the Coroner's Court with a detailed description of the layout of the court provided by Carmel Young in her opening introduction and official welcome. We were then free to move around and occupy first hand the court's key positions, including the coroner's chair.

The following speakers from the Coronial Services Centre provided presentations which detailed their roles and responsibilities during the investigative procedure when a death has occurred in a hospital and then reported to the Coroner.

The State Coroner's Assistance Unit (SCAU): Acting Sergeant Edward Pollard

Acting Sergeant Edward Pollard, working for the Coroners Office, explained the SCAU role in coronial investigations, the police service and its role, and what is expected from a witness during an inquest.

The coroner: Phil Byrne

The coroner’s perspective was presented by charismatic, enthusiastic and entertaining coroner Phil Byrne, who encouraged the group to take part in an open discussion during which he explained details of his role and experiences within the State Coroner’s Office to date. This enabled members to ask questions and interact in an informal manner which was extremely enlightening and very informative. Coroner Byrne provided an interesting insight into the function of the State Coroner in relation to community health and safety and the deliberations and conclusions he has made in various cases. The beneficial impacts the coroner’s recommendations have made on health and safety in the community were also highlighted.

The forensic pathologist: Professor David Ranson

Professor Ranson engaged the group with a lively presentation on the role of the forensic pathologist and the process of conducting autopsies during identification of the deceased and the cause of death. He also explained the stages and education of becoming a trained forensic pathologist and the duties performed on a daily basis. Unfortunately we were not able to see the morgue due to ethical sensitivity but Professor Ranson explained the areas and sections within the department, and a visual demonstration was included in his presentation.

The Clinical Liaison Service (CLS):
Carmel Young, clinical nurse reviewer

Connecting clinicians with coroners is a joint initiative of the State Coroner’s Office and the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine. The CLS is directly involved in producing the Coronial Communiqué which presents interesting cases which have recently been deliberated and are now closed. This information becomes public once the coronial investigation process has been completed and the case closed. Every attempt is made to ensure that individual clinicians and hospitals involved in the case are de-identified. The individual cases outline the clinical summary, coronial investigation, literature, comments by the coroner and recommendations.
The CLS provides a holistic approach to the investigation of deaths in a specialised clinical care setting. The CLS’s priorities are to support the coronial investigation process in investigating adverse events in hospital related deaths, reviewing medical records, and interpreting and/or classifying system or hospital process problems or failures. It also provides services to encourage increased channels of communication between health professional and coronial sectors about the coronal system and adverse events.

**The State Coroner’s Office provides the following services:**
- We speak for the dead to protect the living
- coronial fatality and fire investigations
- recommendations on public health and safety
- State Coroner’s Investigation Unit
- counselling and support service
- death and injury prevention research.

**The Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine provides the following services:**
- Truth conquers all
- forensic pathology and related scientific services
- clinical forensic medical services
- Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria
- consultancy services in ethics and the law
- Clinical Liaison Service
- research and teaching in law and medicine
- national coroners’ information systems.

The State Coroner’s Office of Victoria is committed to improving the safety of all Victorians by providing rigorous, transparent, high quality coronial investigation of unexpected, accidental and unnatural deaths. Of all deaths investigated, approximately 25% occurred within a specialist clinical care setting.

Further details and information can be located at the following web addresses:
- **Coronial Communiqué:** [http://www.vifm.org/communique.html](http://www.vifm.org/communique.html)
- Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine; the Clinical Liaison Service: [www.vifm.org/cls.html](http://www.vifm.org/cls.html)

To register for the next Open Day at the Coronial Services Centre, send an email to: zoed@vifm.org

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the presenters, CLS and the VIFM for inviting members of the rural health sector to the open day and for conducting such an informative and interesting session which certainly offers the opportunity to demystify the coronial process in a comfortable and informal manner.

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