

CONCLUSIONS

Training and procedures of transport employees are not monitored by the Coroner or his deputies because the independent contract agreement prohibits such monitoring. The Grand Jury believes the contract should provide for such monitoring.

The Coroner/Public Administrator/Public Guardian has performed on county time and on County premises personal business for gain. County Management Directive 1511.1 states that personal telephone calls are to be kept to a minimum. The Coroner's personal business for gain has been conducted in his County office on County time and on County phones as well as on his private line. Though an elected official may not be required to spend a normal eight-hour day at his job during office hours, the Coroner has admitted that he has conducted his personal laboratory business in his County office. Since the Coroner holds three County positions simultaneously, including that of County Health Officer, it is reasonable to believe these would require his full time and attention.

Although it may be highly desirable for a County Coroner to hold a medical license and be specifically trained in pathology, California law does not require the person elected to the office of coroner to hold a medical degree. The Committee believes it is more important for the position of Coroner to be proficient in the art of management than in the art of medicine. The Fresno County Coroner has not personally performed autopsies in at least six years and very few in the past 20 years. The Coroner/Public Administrator/Public Guardian's private business has received payments from conservator accounts for laboratory work.

An issue regarding a potential violation of the Political Reform Act has arisen regarding the business manager of the Coroner/Public Administrator/Public Guardian Office. In order to provide tax services to the conservatees, she makes the decision to use an accounting firm with which she has had a business/employment history. She should discontinue this practice.

The Grand Jury began inquiring into the activities of the Coroner/Public Administrator/Public Guardian and his department in August 1998. The County Auditor's Limited Scope Review came to light on October 30, 1998. Since that time, the Coroner/Public Administrator/Public Guardian has taken action to make changes in his department to avoid the appearance of impropriety or conflict of interest. He has removed his private telephone and computer from his office and he has directed the office staff not to pay any invoices from his private laboratory. The locks in the morgue have been changed to deny transport employees access to other parts of the building.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The 1998-1999 Grand Jury makes the following recommendations:

4. The County should consider operating its own in-house body transport service, which would work directly out of the morgue under the Coroner's supervision and control. In the event the County fails to appropriate money to accomplish this effort, the existing contract service system must be re-examined and a more professional service approach be taken.
5. The Coroner/Public Administrator/Public Guardian refrain from conducting any private business for gain in the county facility or during hours that are charged to county departments.
5. The Coroner/Public Administrator/Public Guardian hires a transcriber familiar with medical terminology within the Coroner's office to produce autopsy reports in a timely manner.