



STATE OF OREGON

INTEROFFICE MEMO

TO: Gerry Thompson

DATE: March 9, 1982

FROM: Bob Oliver 

SUBJECT: State Medical Examiner

Last week I had lunch with John Ulwelling, executive director of the State Board of Medical Examiners; and William Brady, M.D., State Medical Examiner.

As you doubtless know, the Office of State Medical Examiner was placed within the Health Division when the division was created in 1971. Of all the "offices" within the division, it is the smallest -- consisting of Dr. Brady and his secretary. They occupy space at the Multnomah County Morgue, shared with that county's medical examiner and a technician who assists in autopsies and tests.

When I became administrator of the Health Division in 1974, it was apparent to me that the State Medical Examiner's office had virtually no degree of interrelation with other programs in the division, and had been placed within the division simply because it was too small to handle its own administrative routine. Dr. Brady and I reached an agreement that his attendance at weekly staff meetings and other meetings of office managers would be voluntary, unless he had something to say or I determined the purpose of the meeting was relevant to his work. (We did, however, occasionally meet for lunch because we found that we share many interests.)

Subsequent administrators, especially Kristine Gebbie, have insisted that Dr. Brady participate in all staff and office manager meetings, on the principle that it promotes cohesiveness of the division. Dr. Brady says matters discussed at these meetings seldom are relevant to his work or the maintenance of his office; that he seldom has occasion to comment on matters under discussion; and that these meetings waste a great deal of his time (worth \$5,346 a month) and bore him. This has led him to contemplate the broader issue of whether he ought to be part of the Health Division.

Ulwelling and Brady suggest consideration be given to relocating the Office. They recognize it could not be viable as an independent unit, and must have some kind of home. Three options were discussed.

The first would be a transfer to Oregon Health Sciences University. Arguing in favor of this is that Dr. Brady spends a substantial amount of time using certain facilities of the university, such as the mass spectrometer (a device used to identify unknown drugs and other substances found in corpses). Dr. Brady is



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reluctant to see this happen, however, because he perceives the dominant philosophy of that university's leadership as putting great stress on educational activities, and less on other public services. While he spends some of his time teaching, his primary task is to determine causes of death for purposes of law enforcement and insurance adjustment. He fears the value of these activities would not be fully recognized by the university's leadership.

The second option would be transfer to the Department of State Police. This, too, has advantages in that Dr. Brady works a great deal of the time with that department's crime laboratories, and much of his work is directed toward the solution of homicides. On the other hand, he fears that department's leadership might be interested only in the criminal side of his work, and other functions not receive proper support.

The third option would be transfer to the State Board of Medical Examiners. While his activities have little direct connection with that board's functions, at least he would be subordinated to a governing body likely fully to appreciate the range of his tasks and give them appropriate support. (The board is entirely fee-supported at present, but there is no reason why a General Fund account could not be established for the medical examiner's activities.)

Dr. Brady says arguments will be advanced that the Health Division would lose the advantage of his expertise -- but he says it seldom is sought, and he could continue to help by telephone (as usually is the case now) regardless of the agency to which he is attached.

Ullwelling and Dr. Brady asked me to think about this for a couple of weeks, discuss it with you and the Governor, and get back to them. I was initially inclined to select the State Police option, but the Board of Medical Examiners makes sense, also. I agree that if Dr. Brady's operation were assigned to the Health Sciences University, it might never be heard from again.

In his usual perverse way, Dr. Brady occupied part of the luncheon hour discussing an interesting autopsy he had performed earlier in the day. I am used to this by now -- but be careful about accepting a luncheon invitation from him if you have a queasy stomach!