Missing & Unidentified Persons at the OCME

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Unidentified Remains

- OCME performs ~8,000 physical exams per year
- ~100 per month brought in as unidentified persons where scientific ID is required
- Vast majority identified within 24 hours
- 1-5 cases per year take more than 1 year to identify
- ~125 OK UP cases → 41 are awaiting exhumation

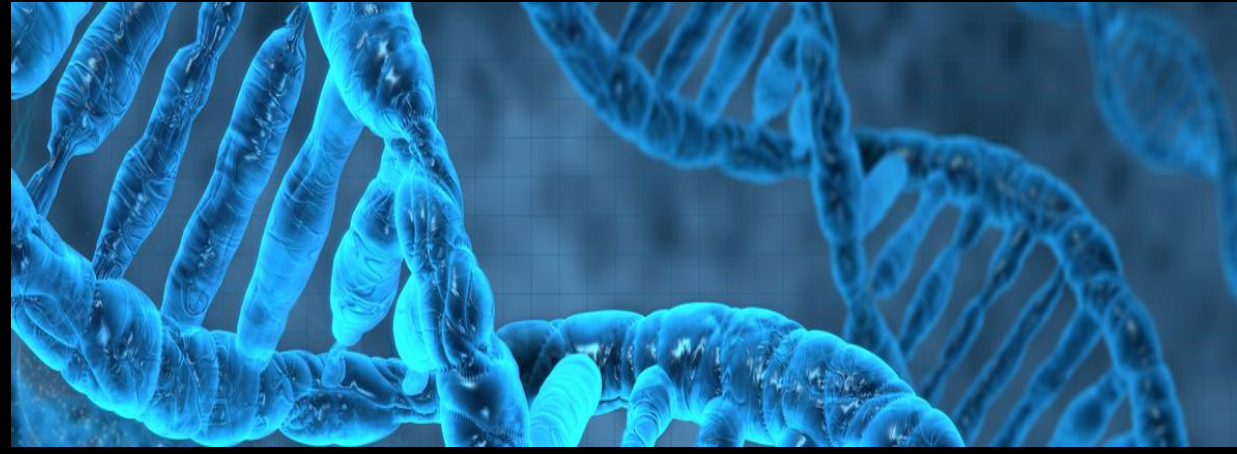
Tracking UP Cases

- Tracked internally in OCME database and using NamUs → managed by forensic anthropologists (FAs)
- Per Francine's Law [74 Okla. Stat. §151.3 (2019)] all UP cases entered in NamUs within 30 days
- FAs coordinate entry of data (e.g., fingerprints, x-rays, dental data, facial reconstructions, DNA) for comparison with MPs across the US



- **Oklahoma has a national reputation for being extensive NamUs contributors**
  - **OCME requested to provide feedback to NamUs as “superusers”**
  - **Based on number of NamUs entries by OK - UNTCHI provided DNA processing under multiple grants**
  - **NamUs requested OCME partnership for national forensic science conference presentation in 2027**

DNA Collection & Comparison



- Efficient and cost-effective methods exhausted first → DNA samples are submitted to an appropriate DNA lab
- Success relies on availability of Family Reference Samples (FRS)
  - MiOK day twice per year to collect family FRS
  - OCME FAs routinely collect FRS and coordinates with other agencies
- No line-item in OCME budget for DNA testing → relying on grant funds awarded to other agencies/states

Barriers to Identification

- Sometimes do not know who is missing!
  - MP reports not taken or not entered into NamUs
  - NamUs entries often contain little to no information for comparison
- Obtaining data for scientific identifications
  - 12% of decedents (~1000/yr.) currently identified by fingerprints → no longer collected by OK as of Feb. 2026
  - Rely on grant funding from other agencies / states for DNA testing
- Technology challenges
  - OCME database 26 years old and at end of life → limited capabilities for searching, tracking, and reporting
  - Network changes severely slowing acquisition and review of data

Advances in Anthropology & DNA

- 2 additional forensic anthropologists hired (4 total)
  - Allowed OCME to address long-term unidentified remains → 40+ long-term UP ID'ed since 2023 dating back to 1949
- Radiocarbon "bomb pulse" dating to identify modern missing persons and effectively prioritize DNA testing
- Postmortem CT scanning and access to online medical records→ IDs within 24-48 hours from x-rays
- Forensic Investigative Genetic Genealogy (FIGG) – generate leads for presumed homicide cases

Unclear Jurisdictional Responsibility

- Primarily an issue for MP cases where last known location is unclear → LE MP report required for NamUs entry and access to some resources

- For UP skeletal remains cases, OCME works with local, state, tribal, and federal partners while they determine jurisdiction.
  - Working with Tribal Nations to develop MOUs for inadvertent discoveries of skeletal remains that may be MP

Breakdowns in Decedent ID

- Need trained NamUs users at all LE agencies
  - Need to know what questions to ask / information needed
  - Cases must be created, updated, and removed from NamUs once individuals are found

- OCME Funding
  - Maintain technology for decedent ID (PMCT, portals)
  - Track unidentified remains (OCME database)
  - Screen skeletal remains (radiocarbon dating)
  - DNA testing at most appropriate lab for timely ID
  - Retain sufficient, qualified personnel

