4.1. From Death Scene to the Morgue: NFSS Approach in Preserving Forensic Evidence and Preventing Decedent Revictimization

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Learning Objectives:
By the end of the presentation, participants will be able to:
1. Describe the importance of death scene preservation
2. Identify where potential forensic evidence is lost due to improper body transportation
3. State the steps taken by the NFSS in preventing decedent re-victimization

Abstract:
The Belize Medical Examiner’s Office under the directorate of the NFSS has made great strides despite its fairly recent inception. Investigations of medicolegal deaths have been given a boost by the scientific approach the NFSS has undertaken in recent years.

In the past, death scenes were processed and all evidence, including expended shells and other items, were packaged and labelled and placed along with the body in the back of a pick-up truck to be ferried to the nearest hospital morgue. Furthermore, autopsies of decomposed bodies were performed on-site followed by immediate burial.

The NFSS has made great efforts to transition away from undesirable practices of the past with a view to minimize the occurrence of incidents that may lead to loss of potential evidence or revictimization of decedents. Significant investments of time and resources have been made in order to upgrade the procedures employed to maximize preservation of evidence and provide dignified handling and transportation of decedents.

This presentation will look at past practices, lessons learnt from past experiences, and the measures the NFSS as a whole is now taking to improve the medicolegal death investigation system.