4.3. Strategies for Postmortem Toxicology in Cases Involving Decomposed Human Remains

Dr Stephen Morley
Consultant Chemical Pathologist and Forensic Toxicologist
Leicester Royal Infirmary, UK

Learning Objectives:
By the end of the session the participants will be able to:

1. Discuss some of the changes encountered with decomposition of human remains and how these changes may impact post-mortem toxicology
2. Discuss how the Belize climate may affect decomposition in a different manner to most of the published literature
3. Discuss how tissue samples may be of more relevance in very decomposed bodies

Abstract:
Post mortem toxicology has plenty of caveats in interpretation even before decomposition of the body is considered. Significant decomposition is common in post mortem cases in Belize due to climate and less rapid refrigeration of bodies. This causes several issues including difficulty in obtaining post mortem blood and fluids, redistribution of drugs at a more rapid rate than in milder climates, as well as the loss of tissue definition for the pathologist, making anatomical findings less obvious for the pathologists.

This talk will discuss some of the changes encountered with decomposition. Then, following observations by the Belize pathologists, will discuss original potential solutions using the more resilient tissues and organs. This may allow Belize to take a lead in the toxicological investigation of decomposed remains.