

# Mecklenburg County M E Office

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## REPORT OF AUTOPSY EXAMINATION

### DECEDENT

**Document Identifier** B201002489

**Autopsy Type** ME Autopsy

**Name** Valerie Grace Hamilton

**Age** 23 yrs

**Race** White

**Sex** F

### AUTHORIZATION

**Authorized By** Christopher J. Gullledge MD **Received From** Mecklenburg

### ENVIRONMENT

**Date of Exam** 09/20/2010 **Time of Exam** 09:00

**Autopsy Facility** Mecklenburg County M E Office **Persons Present** Liz Fisher

### CERTIFICATION

#### Cause of Death

Combined Heroin and Cocaine Toxicity

**The facts stated herein are correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.**

#### Digitally signed by

Christopher J. Gullledge MD 21 January 2011 14:42

### DIAGNOSES

Fresh needle puncture site in right antecubital fossa

Acute patchy bronchopneumonia, mild

Pulmonary congestion and edema, moderate

Moderate decomposition

### IDENTIFICATION

#### Body Identified By

Papers/ID Tag

### EXTERNAL DESCRIPTION

**Length** 65 inches

**Weight** 129 pounds

**Body Condition** Decomposed

**Rigor** None

**Livor** None

**Hair** Blonde/brown, medium length

**Eyes** Brown irides, no petechiae in sclera or conjunctiva

**Teeth** Natural

Received is a sealed body bag containing a decedent wrapped in white trace sheets. The trace sheets are unwrapped to reveal a wrapped brown blanket which is wrapped around a pair of white sheets. A fitted sheet and a flat sheet are both present and are blood stained around the head of the decedent. The decedent is positioned on the left side with the knees drawn up to the chest. The trace sheets and bedding wrapped around the decedent are removed when appropriate and bagged as evidence. The decedent is wearing a green dress, blue strapless bra which has been dislodged downward to expose the right nipple and a pair of blue thong panties with a small tear present over the vagina. The clothing is removed and put into evidence. Personal effects accompanying the body include plastic and cloth bracelets around the right wrist, a white plastic ring on the right finger, a pair of clear stone white metal earrings,

a pair of clear stone and yellow metal earrings, a white metal ball earring in the left ear, a pair of black ball earrings in the left ear, a white star earring in the right ear and a black star earring in the left ear. The decedent has multiple body piercings including a white metal lip ring on the right lower lip, a purple and white stone nipple ring on the right, a purple and white stone nipple ring on the left, a pink and white stone belly ring, a white metal with black stone clitoral ring and a pair of subcutaneous studs in the right shoulder, one with a pink stone and one with a purple stone. Identifying characteristics include multiple tattoos including an outline of three stars on the back of the neck, a butterfly over the left hip, an abstract design on the right wrist and an Asian character on the right ankle. No significant scars are noted. There is a pink discoloration consistent with a birth mark on the right foot. Decomposition is evidenced by green discoloration of the head, neck and upper chest, skin slippage and bleb formation, putrefaction, marbling and bloating. The chest, abdomen, and extremities show significantly less decomposition than the head, neck and upper chest.

A sexual assault evidence kit is collected. Examination of the decedent's genitals reveals no evidence of trauma.

## **INJURIES**

A fresh needle puncture site is present within the right antecubital fossa. Discoloration is present around the needle puncture, however, discerning whether this discoloration is the result of a bruise or decomposition is impossible.

## **DISPOSITION OF CLOTHING AND PERSONAL EFFECTS**

### **The following items are preserved as evidence**

Trace sheets, blanket and sheets, bra, sexual assault evidence kit (including dress and panties), jewelry (plastic and cloth bracelets, white plastic ring, yellow metal clear stone earrings x 2, white metal clear stone earrings x 2, black ball earrings x 2, white ball earring x 1, white star earring x 1, black star earring x 1), body jewelry (white metal lip ring, purple and white nipple ring x 2, pink and white belly ring), body jewelry (pink stone stud, purple stone stud), left fingernail swab, right fingernail swab, left breast swab, right breast swab, blood card which are transferred to Detective Whitworth of the CMPD on 9/22/10.

## **PROCEDURES**

### **Identification**

Identification is performed by the Charlotte Mecklenburg Police department by visual examination of the decedent's tattoos. Confirmation of the tattoos is performed during the post mortem examination.

### **Special Evidence Collection**

A sexual assault kit is collected. Right and left breast swabbings are collected; right and left fingernail swabs are performed; and a blood card is collected.

## **INTERNAL EXAMINATION**

### **Body Cavities**

A small amount of decomposition fluid is present. The organs are in their correct anatomic location.

### **Cardiovascular System**

#### **Heart Weight** 240 grams

No significant coronary atherosclerotic disease is present. The chambers are slightly dilated, however, the myocardial walls are not thickened. The valves are unremarkable. On section the myocardium is soft, red-brown and has lost its usual character. The aorta and its major branches are patent and show no atherosclerotic disease.

### **Respiratory System**

#### **Right Lung Weight** 400 grams

#### **Left Lung Weight** 400 grams

There is no evidence of pulmonary embolus. On sectioning the lungs are without gross evidence of consolidation or tumor. The lungs are moderately congested. The larynx, trachea and major bronchi contain no foreign material.

### **Gastrointestinal System**

The tongue is unremarkable on section. The esophagus is empty and the mucosa is unremarkable. The stomach contains 200 cc of green food particles without an odor and the gastric mucosa is unremarkable. Examination of the intestines along their length reveals no unusual lesions. The appendix is present.

### **Liver**

**Liver Weight** 880 grams

The capsule is intact and sectioning reveals a homogenous soft red-brown parenchyma with numerous gas bubbles from decomposition. The gallbladder is present.

## **Spleen**

**Spleen Weight** 120 grams

Unremarkable

## **Pancreas**

Unremarkable

## **Urinary**

**Right Kidney Weight** 110 grams

**Left Kidney Weight** 130 grams

The kidneys are similar in appearance with normal renal architecture on section. The bladder contains no urine and the mucosa is unremarkable.

## **Reproductive**

Normal female anatomy with intact uterus and ovaries.

## **Endocrine**

The thyroid gland and adrenal glands are unremarkable on sectioning.

## **Neurologic**

**Brain Weight** 1380 grams

The brain has a normal gyral pattern with thin delicate leptomeninges. The vessels at the base of the brain are unremarkable. The brain is fixed for further neuropathologic examination due to decomposition associated softening.

Neuropathologic examination is performed on the fixed brain. Sectioning the cerebrum, cerebellum and brainstem reveals only decompositional associated changes.

## **Skin**

Injuries are present as previously described.

## **Immunologic System**

Unremarkable

## **Musculoskeletal System**

Layered neck dissection reveals no evidence of soft tissue neck injury. The thyroid cartilage, cricoid cartilage and hyoid bone are intact. There is mild mid thoracic scoliosis present.

## **MICROSCOPIC EXAMINATION**

### **Microscopic Comment**

All sections show a variable degree of autolysis.

### **Cardiovascular**

Sections of the heart show mild autolysis. There is no evidence of cardiac fibrosis or myofibril disarray within the sections.

### **Respiratory**

Sections of the lungs show mild autolysis. There is a mild acute patchy bronchiocentric bronchopneumonia within sampled areas. Aspirated gastric contents are not appreciated. No polarizable foreign material is identified. Moderate pulmonary congestion and edema are present. There are areas with postmortem bacterial overgrowth within sections.

### **Liver**

Section of the liver shows a moderate degree of autolysis. No evidence of fibrosis or steatosis is present within the section.

### **Genitourinary**

Section of the kidneys shows a moderate degree of autolysis. No sclerosis or fibrosis is identified.

## **Neurologic**

Sections of the brain show a moderate degree of autolysis. Sections of the cerebrum, cerebellum and brainstem show no evidence of meningitis, infarction, hemorrhage or neoplasm. Cellular detail is not retained adequately to examine for the presence of early ischemic changes.

## **SUMMARY AND INTERPRETATION**

Valerie Grace Hamilton was a 23 year old white female with no medical history who was found deceased after having been missing for several days. She had last been seen at a local tavern and had left with another individual. Drug use was believed to have occurred around that time. She was reportedly noted by a witness to be unresponsive and needing medical attention. She was taken from the residence where the drug use occurred, however, medical care was not sought or provided. She was later found within the storage unit after an extensive search by police.

Autopsy findings include a white female in a moderate state of decomposition. The decedent is identified by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department through the use of identifying characteristics. A fresh needle puncture site is present within the right antecubital fossa. No other evidence of trauma is present after detailed examination. Evidence of natural disease includes a mild acute patchy bronchopneumonia in a bronchiocentric distribution. This finding is common when there is a prolonged stuporous state. Moderate pulmonary congestion and edema is also present.

Toxicological analysis reveals an aortic blood cocaine level of 0.042 mg/L with metabolites benzoylecgonine present at a level of 0.18 mg/L and cocaethylene present at a level of 0.042 mg/L. This level of cocaine and its metabolites is toxic. The presence of the parent drug cocaine indicates recent use. Ethanol is present at a level of 90 mg/dL. Some of the ethanol may be as a result of decomposition. This ethanol level is not toxic, however would contribute to the respiratory depression caused by heroin. No benzodiazepines or fentanyl is present within aortic blood. Opiates are not able to be detected due to an insufficient quantity of sample. Within the liver, morphine is present at a level of 0.60 mg/kg. No other opiates are detected. This morphine level is above the therapeutic range, and is within ranges reported for fatalities. Within the urine, 6-monoacetylmorphine is present at a level of less than 0.005 mg/L and morphine is present at a level of 0.48 mg/L. These levels indicate that heroin is the source of the morphine which is present. Caffeine, cocaine, cocaethylene and hydrocodone are present within the urine. Trace levamisole is present. No other opiates or other organic bases are detected. Metabolism of the all of the drugs occurred during the time between administration and death. Metabolism of the drugs would lower the levels present within the decedent at the time of examination without diminishing their toxic effects. Decomposition effects on drug levels in this case would be minimal. The combined effect of cocaine and heroin would be lethal.

Based on the history, autopsy and toxicological examination, it is my opinion the cause of death in this case is combined heroin and cocaine toxicity. Ethanol would contribute. The manner of death in this case will be classified as undetermined. As the central issue relating to the determination of the manner of death in this case is the delay in seeking medical attention, this classification may be updated after judicial proceedings have occurred.

## **DIAGRAMS**

1. Adult (front/back)

State of North Carolina

Name of Decedent: Valerie Hamblen

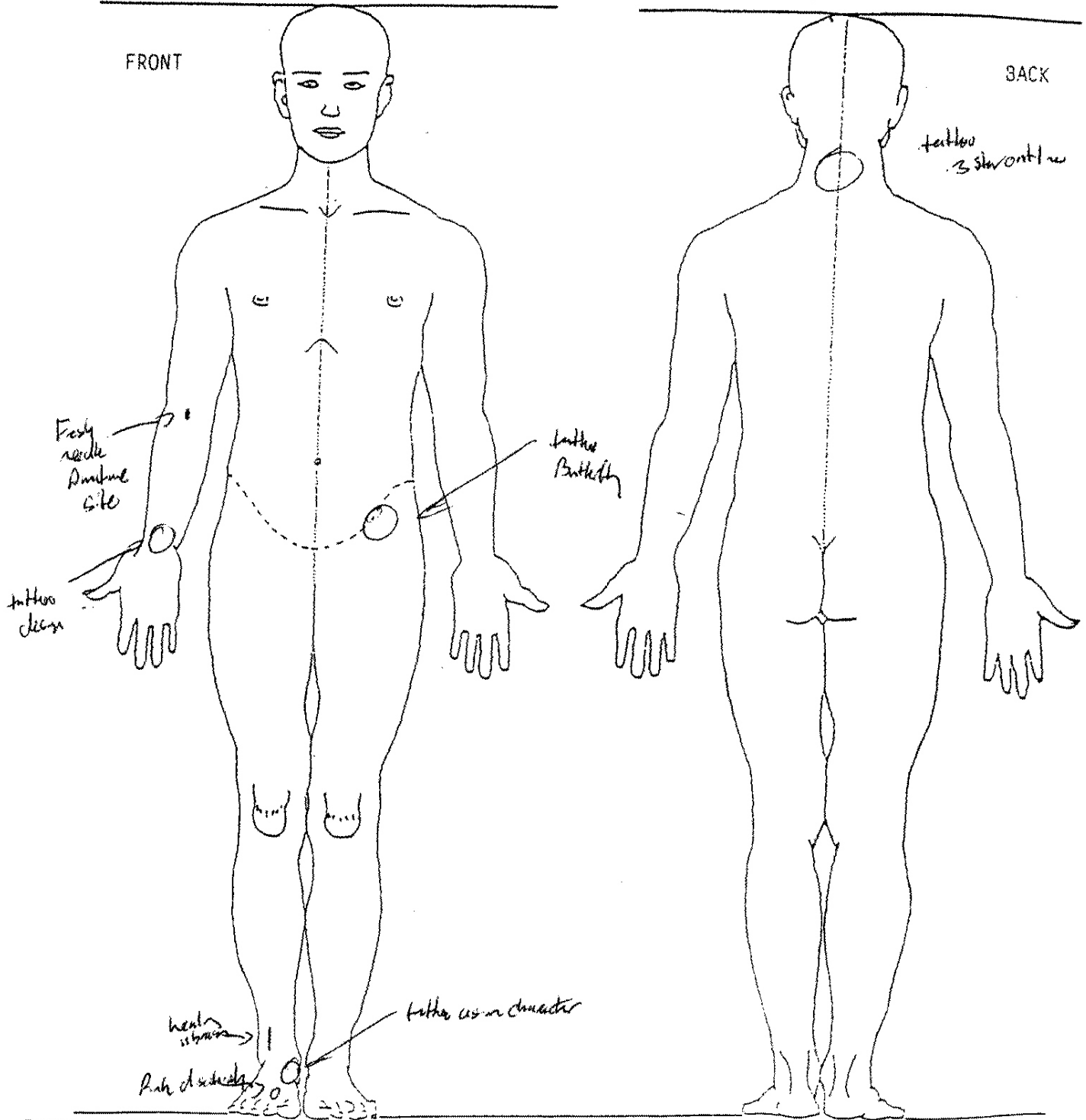
Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

Autopsy # B10-2489

Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27599-7580

Examined By: [Signature] Date: 9/20/01

### BODY DIAGRAM: ADULT (Front/Back)



DEHN 1917 (4/97)  
Medical Examiner

This form may be photocopied.

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