

The following represents a position statement by the American Association of Pathologists' Assistants regarding Shawn Parcels Misrepresenting Himself as a Pathologists' Assistant or PA

The American Association of Pathologists' Assistants (AAPA) and its members are disgusted by media reports that an unqualified individual has fraudulently taken advantage of grieving families by providing private autopsy services under the guise of a being a self-proclaimed forensics expert and other inappropriate titles, including pathologists' assistant or PA. The AAPA would like to make it clear that this individual, Shawn Parcels, is not a qualified pathologists' assistant in any way. His actions of performing autopsies without appropriate qualifications and without direct supervision by a licensed, board certified anatomic pathologist are against our ethical and professional standards and are outside of our professional scope of practice.

According to news stories, Shawn Parcels faces three counts of theft and three counts of criminal desecration of a body. He is also being sued by the Kansas attorney general and Kansas Board of Healing Arts, accused of being unqualified to conduct autopsies. Local media reported an account of a Wichita-area man who, nearly two years ago, paid a man claiming to be a "forensic pathology expert" \$3,000 to conduct an autopsy on his wife and help answer questions about her sudden death. Mr. Parcels is accused of taking thousands of dollars from grieving families and never issuing autopsy reports. The Kansas attorney general, the Better Business Bureau, and families across the United States call Parcels a scam artist. "To date, we have 34 that have come forward in 29 different states," says Lacey Langford, in court in Topeka for a hearing in Parcels' case. Langford says her family became a victim of Parcels after her mother's death. The Kansas Attorney General's Office won't even identify Parcels as a pathologists' assistant, saying under Kansas law, he's not qualified. The word "autopsy" was written in quotes in court documents pertaining to Parcels' case. Kansas law says pathologists' assistants must work under the supervision of a physician. Parcels disputes the claim that he's not qualified to do the work with training as a pathologists' assistant. Parcels calls the certification examination tied to accreditation "voluntary" and not necessary to do the job. He says the PAs he knows of are not certified and this is how the industry works. A judge upheld a temporary restraining order against Parcels, preventing him from conducting autopsies, forensic pathology, or tissue recovery in the state while both a civil lawsuit and a criminal case are pending.

Although he calls himself a pathologists' assistant and has referenced the AAPA, Shawn Parcels is not a member of the AAPA, nor is he certified by the ASCP-BOC. Mr. Parcels represents none of the educational, professional, or ethical standards that the AAPA and its members uphold.

A Certified Pathologists' Assistant is a highly trained allied healthcare professional who is qualified to provide various services in anatomic pathology under the direction and supervision of a licensed, Board Certified, or Board Eligible Anatomic Pathologist. Although pathologists' assistants are key partners in assisting the pathologist to arrive at a pathologic diagnosis by examining, dissecting, and sampling surgical specimens in the hospital pathology lab and by participating in autopsies, it is the sole responsibility of the Pathologist to render a diagnosis. Pathologists' assistants currently prepare for their roles as a mid-level practitioner in anatomic pathology by successfully completing a NAACLS accredited Pathologists' Assistant training program leading to a Master's degree and by passing the

American Society for Clinical Pathology Board of Certification (ASCP-BOC) exam. Prior to 2010, pathologists' assistants who had received on-the-job training (via a 3-year supervised internship) and had successfully attained certification as a Pathologists' Assistant from the ASCP-BOC have the same qualifications as NAACLS program-trained individuals and are also capable as mid-level practitioners in anatomic pathology. The on-the-job training route was discontinued in 2005, and those individuals had until 2010 to pass the ASCP-BOC exam.

Mr. Parcels has never attended a NAACLS accredited Pathologists' Assistant training program, did not receive on-the-job training through a supervised internship prior to 2010, and has never been eligible to sit for the ASCP-BOC Pathologists' Assistant Certification exam. Mr. Parcels may not even be qualified to perform high complexity testing in a clinical or anatomic pathology laboratory under federal CLIA regulations, which represents the minimum education requirement (CLIA requires only an associate degree and minimal laboratory training to perform high complexity testing).

The news reports from Kansas, statements by Mr. Parcels regarding pathologists' assistants, and his involvement in other high-profile cases in the past while misrepresenting his qualifications is infuriating, is an embarrassment to those who work in pathology, and is damaging to our profession as certified pathologists' assistants. Mr. Parcels has no legitimate training and holds no credentials, yet claims to be a pathologists' assistant and forensics pathology expert. This misrepresentation of pathologists' assistants and functioning outside of our scope of practice by this individual and others like him is an affront to every qualified pathologists' assistant who has invested a great deal of time, effort, and money in themselves to acquire the required didactic and clinical training to become a pathologists' assistant, prepare for the certification exam, become certified through the ASCP, and maintain their certification through the ASCP credential maintenance program (CMP) which requires completion of 45 continuing education credits per three year period (will increase to 60 credits per three year period effective 2022). Mr. Parcels misrepresents himself to the public as being qualified and an expert but is not accountable to the institutions that provide the credentials for our profession, claiming that they are "voluntary." If he were a member of the AAPA, his membership would be revoked for misconduct according to our bylaws. He would also likely lose his certification by the ASCP, if he were certified. If he were licensed, he would lose that as well. His response to legal actions against him in the state of Kansas is that he will simply move his business to a nearby state and continue to offer private autopsy services using whatever title he can, including pathologists' assistant. If state licensure for qualified pathologists' assistants were in place in Kansas and the 28 other states where he has provided autopsy services, he would not be able to work under the title of pathologists' assistant and he would surely not be able to perform private autopsies as a pathologists' assistant.

Pathologists' assistants are physician extenders or midlevel practitioners just as physician assistants or nurse practitioners are; however, pathologists' assistants are not licensed in most states. The profession formed in the late 1960s very soon after the physician assistant profession did. Since pathologists' assistants are not primary care providers, and since the profession did not have the same level of support from the American Medical Association that physician assistants historically enjoyed, pathologists' assistants are licensed in only a few states. New York is the most recent state to license pathologists' assistants, with licensing signed into law in 2016. The work pathologists' assistants do by examining, dissecting, and sampling surgical specimens in the hospital pathology lab, and participating in autopsies is vital to patient care and to families of the deceased and those medical professionals who provided their care. The AAPA believes that qualified pathologists' assistants should be licensed to assure quality care, to protect the public, and to provide a legal tool to stop individuals like Shawn Parcels from taking advantage of grieving families.

About the AAPA: *The American Association of Pathologists' Assistants (AAPA) was founded in 1972 as a not-for-profit volunteer organization of allied health practitioners dedicated to the advocacy and advancement of the pathologists' assistant profession. The AAPA advocates, promotes and sustains the highest education and professional standards for the profession, for all associated educational training programs and for individual pathologists' assistants. It is our mission to provide our members with high quality, targeted continuing education (CE) opportunities, as well as professional development and leadership activities to include networking and support. Additionally, the AAPA strives to promote and support high-quality standards within the scope of practice for pathologists' assistants in anatomic pathology, ensuring the provision of high-quality patient care. There are approximately 2,500 ASCP certified pathologists' assistants practicing in hospitals and labs throughout the United States. Approximately 50 of these are certified PAs working internationally in Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. The AAPA as a whole represents 2,000 certified or certification exam eligible members. The AAPA is an organizational member of the ASCP, the American Joint Committee on Cancer (AJCC), the Commission on Cancer (CoC), and the National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Science (NAACLS).*

References:

1. The Wichita Eagle: Kansas Man Accused of Tricking Grieving Families and Performing Illegal Autopsies. <https://www.kansas.com/news/local/crime/article228480939.html>
2. KWCH12: Court Decision Upheld Against Man Accused of Defrauding Families in Mourning. <https://www.kwch.com/content/news/Decision-upheld-to-bar-forensic-pathology-expert-from-conducting-autopsies-in-KS-508831211.html>
3. American Association of Pathologists' Assistants: Pathologists' Assistants Scope of Practice – updated 9/2018: [https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.pathassist.org/resource/resmgr/docs/2018 - scope of practice.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.pathassist.org/resource/resmgr/docs/2018_-_scope_of_practice.pdf)