



NCIS News



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It's been such a long time since we last put out a general newsletter about the happenings at the NCIS Unit we thought it time we pulled one together! Hopefully users that have had any specific questions about the system have contacted us directly. For those of you who are interested in how the system is progressing, the various uses of the database, and other operational matters, we hope you find this newsletter of interest...

Staff News

Since the last edition of NCIS News we have seen several changes to NCIS staff. We bid farewell to Judy Schultz, our Fatal Road Crash Database Coder and welcomed Jo Cotsonis as NCIS Access Liaison Officer, Steven Haas as Research Officer and Catherine Daley as Administration Officer. Marde Hoy is currently on extended leave and will return in December 2010.

Steven Haas—Research Officer

Steve is a qualified pharmacist who commenced with the NCIS at the end of March. Steven has recently completed a PhD in collaboration with Monash University's Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine, examining the cardiovascular impact of certain medications upon patients with various medical conditions. Steve is beginning to enjoy life once again now that the PhD has been completed! (He is getting married in August and has a passion for life, especially inline hockey, ice hockey and snowboarding).

Jo Cotsonis—Access Liaison Officer

Jo joined the NCIS team in March last year as Administration Officer, and since then has gone on to fill Marde Hoy's role as acting NCIS Access Officer while Marde is on long service leave. Prior to working at NCIS Jo worked in local Government as a Project Officer and also spent some time living and working interstate in Brisbane. Jo is very musically talented and has

performed in duos and bands both interstate and in Melbourne and currently heads Melbourne band Wicked Annabel as singer. Jo is also an avid Collingwood supporter— "Go Pies!"

Catherine Daley—Administration Officer

Catherine started with NCIS in February as Administration Officer having previously worked in contract roles at DHS, DOJ and various state government agencies. Catherine is enjoying the work at NCIS, and, having previously worked in more obscure roles such as testing computer games, working in art galleries and working in the film industry, Catherine is glad to finally put her studies (Bachelor of Social Sciences) to use!

Student Placements

In the last two years the NCIS have hosted 5 students completing the Health Information Management course (Latrobe University). These students have worked on a variety of projects which have included:

- Compilation of suggestions made in published reports for improvement of the NCIS and Coronial data;
- Review of identified Quality Assurance errors in an effort to identify trends and areas requiring additional training;
- Review and remapping of existing occupation coding – from ASCO to ANZSCO;
- Review of the 6 Local Case Management Systems utilised by coronial jurisdictions, documenting differences and similarities;
- Identification, review and sequencing of linked cases for the new Multiple Fatality Event feature;
- Research requests as deemed appropriate.

Funding

A five year budget for the NCIS for 2009-2014 was submitted to the NCIS Board of Management for consideration in April 2009. This proposal outlined funding required to continue to operate, maintain and strategically develop the NCIS.

The government agencies which provide operational funding for the system (which are represented on the NCIS Board of Management) agreed in principle to continue to provide operational funding to the NCIS until at least 2014.

This continued government support for funding of the NCIS is a great reinforcement of the important resource this national data collection has become.

System News

New Version of NCIS Interface Released

A new version of the NCIS web interface is to be released in late June 2010, which will increase the searching options for users, and add extra functionality to the system. Users will be able to search across additional administrative dates that pertain to a case (such as dates of last change to a record, or the date of case or coroner closure), select a wider range of fielded options to combine with keyword searches (such as intent type, and general type of death classifications) and return data elements such as ICD-10 codes and geocoded values.

New features include an ability to set up automatic notification emails when particular types of death are added/changed on the system, the ability to capture information about coronial response recommendations, and the linkage of deaths that resulted from one incident (e.g. murder/suicides or multiple fatality road incidents).

We look forward to getting your feedback about this new version, and hope it enhances your experience in using the NCIS. We will be sending out a survey to users a few months after the new version is released to capture your thoughts and experiences. Completing this survey will allow us to further enhance the system in future.

New Zealand data to come online

The final arrangements are being made with New Zealand to permit coronial data from New Zealand to be uploaded to the NCIS. The New Zealand Ministry of Justice has been coding their coronial data to the same dataset used by the NCIS since 1 July 2007, and it is anticipated all deaths reported to a coroner in New Zealand from this date will be retrospectively uploaded to the NCIS within the next few months.

Only New Zealand cases where the coronial investigation is complete will be uploaded to the NCIS, and initially full text searching of documents on New Zealand cases will not be possible due to the scanned format of attached reports. A notification to all NCIS users will be provided once New Zealand data is available on the NCIS, along with an explanation of how to apply to access this data.

Geocoding Project

A change in how best to geocode address data on the NCIS means that residential and incident address data will be geocoded for closed non-natural deaths only, based on the ASGC 2006 version. The data for 2007 has been geocoded, with 2006 and 2008 the next priorities. Searching on geocoded boundaries is possible in the new NCIS version.

Recent and Upcoming Activities

AMDIG Workshop – 18 & 19 November 2010

The annual Australasian Mortality Data Interest Group (AMDIG) workshop is being held in Melbourne this November. Co-hosted by the NCIS Unit and the Monash University Department of Forensic Medicine, workshop themes include suicide data, drug and alcohol data, international developments, methodological aspects of mortality data, and the death investigation process. More information about the workshop can be accessed from www.ncis.org.au or contact Catherine Daley on 03 9684 4442 or catherined@vifm.org to register your interest. If you use or manage mortality data, this workshop will be of high interest!

Senate Inquiry into Suicide in Australia

In late 2009, the NCIS Unit made a submission to the Senate Inquiry into Suicide in Australia, particularly focusing on the item surrounding the accuracy of suicide data. The NCIS Unit was subsequently invited to provide verbal evidence before the Inquiry. Issues covered in the NCIS submission included difficulties surrounding accurate recording of suicide, guidelines used by clerks when assigning intent on the NCIS, and possible avenues for further work in improving the recording of suicides. The NCIS submission (submission number 84) can be viewed from the Senate Inquiry website on http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/clac_ctte/suicide/submissions/sublist.htm

The NCIS Unit continues to be involved in the National Committee for Standardised Reporting for Suicide to discuss possible initiatives to progress this issue.

Data from the Fatal Road Crash Database (FRCD)

For the past few years the NCIS Unit has been responsible for managing the Fatal Road Crash Database, previously managed by the Australian Transport Safety Bureau. With funding provided

by the Road Safety Unit of the Federal Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, the NCIS Unit has engaged two part time coders who use data from the NCIS and other road crash traffic reports to code a wide range of information about fatal road crashes in Australia. Detailed items such as type of intersection, seating positions of persons involved in a crash, weather conditions, type of road and traffic control devices involved are all coded on the FRCD. The FRCD currently comprises a six year data set data (2000-2006) and will soon be available for researchers to access. For further information about the FRCD, please contact Jessica Pearse on 03 9684 4414 or jessicap@vifm.org

International Interest in the NCIS

The NCIS continues to generate interest from countries around the world. NCIS has recently received inquiries from a University in Toronto, Canada, a Japanese research centre and an outdoor safety council in New Zealand about obtaining access to Australian coronial data via the NCIS. Consideration of whether overseas research groups can access the NCIS will be undertaken over the next few months.

Data Quality Activities

Establishment of the Technical and Methods Advisory Panel

To supplement the individual record quality checking performed by the NCIS Unit, a Technical and Methods Advisory Panel has been established to consider some of the wider inconsistencies that may exist within the NCIS data set, and suggest possible avenues to improve these aspects.

It has been noted there is variation across jurisdictions and practitioners as to whether certain deaths are considered to be from natural or external causes (e.g. complications from falls, mesothelioma, anaphalaxis), and that there are opportunities to enhance the coronial information available for certain fields (such as indigenous status and country of birth). Issues such as whether data on the NCIS should be linked to other data sets also needs appropriate discussion and consideration.

Members of the panel have been selected to represent a wide range of stakeholder interests with differing areas of expertise. These include a State Coroner representative, two user representatives (who are also epidemiologists), a representative from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the NCIS Quality Manager, the NCIS Manager and the NCIS Director.

This panel will be recommending particular initiatives to the NCIS Committee for consideration, and we will keep users updated with any significant developments.

Case Closure & Document Attachment Update

Case closure rates

The current case closure rates across the full NCIS data set indicate that overall 82% of cases on the NCIS are closed. TAS, SA, NT and the ACT have a case closure rate of 90% or more and

TABLE 1: Case closure rates

State/Territory	% Closed
ACT	92%
NSW	69%
NT	91%
QLD	78%
SA	95%
TAS	93%
VIC	87%
WA	88%
Total	82%

most States/Territories have a case closure rate of more than 75%. QLD has shown a significant improvement in their case closure rate, increasing from 57% to 78% since the last issue of NCIS News (see Table 1).

Document attachment rates

There continues to be a steady increase in attachment rates for most jurisdictions. WA has shown the largest increase in document attachment with an almost 20% improvement in their Autopsy attachment rate. As reported in the last edition of NCIS News, we are continuing to liaise with Forensic Providers in QLD and SA to enable automatic electronic attachment of their Autopsy and Toxicology reports. Overall, Police Narratives continue to be the most reliably attached document, with all but one jurisdiction having an attachment rate of over 90% (see Table 2).

TABLE 2: Document attachment rates

State/Territory	Autopsy	Finding	Toxicology	Police Narrative
ACT	93%	91%	70%	95%
NSW	76%	21%	78%	53%
NT	94%	96%	60%	96%
QLD	0%	16%	0%	91%
SA	1%	43%	12%	100%
TAS	73%	87%	88%	100%
VIC	90%	100%	97%	93%
WA	56%	95%	79%	100%

NCIS Users

Search Tips for NCIS Users

When searching on open cases, be careful what you use as your criteria....

When searching across cases not yet closed on the NCIS, users should be aware that not all fields will have been completed, and this can influence your search results. If you include an element in your search which may not yet be populated for open cases, you may miss cases of relevance. For example, if you select a Time Location Type of "Incident" as one of your criteria when building your search, any cases which do not yet have incident information entered will not be returned in your search results....that is, relevant cases that have no incident information will not appear in your search results at all...even if they meet your other criteria. The database will only return cases where there is a value in the Time Location Type of Incident.

Therefore when searching on open cases try to restrict your criteria only to those elements which are normally entered before the closure of a case – such as age, gender, residential postcode, case type notification, intent type notification (for some jurisdictions) and the medical cause of death. This should reduce the risk that cases of relevance don't appear because other elements you have included in your search have not yet been populated.

Reminder

NCIS would like to remind users that they should not perform data requests for third parties using the NCIS, as system access has been provided for the use of your organisation only. We ask NCIS users to direct parties which inquire about coronial fatality data to the NCIS Unit.

Fatal Facts

Edition 21 of Fatal Facts will soon be available on the NCIS website.

The specific topic of focus in Edition 21 involves quad bike deaths.

Comments and Suggestions

We welcome your input! If you have any comments or suggestions for the content of NCIS News, please contact Catherine Daley on (03) 9684 4442 or at ncis@vifm.org.

The next edition of NCIS News is scheduled for release in late 2010.