MANNERS OF DEATH

1. Homicide. Someone else caused the victim's death, whether by intention (robber shoots convenience store clerk) or by criminal negligence (drunk driver, going 55 mph on Fondren, runs red light at Bellaire and strikes pedestrians in crosswalk). After the forensic determination is made, it may of course be altered as a result of a grand jury or other legal inquiry. For instance, when one child shoots another, the forensic examination may conclude from the body that homicide was the manner of death, but after considering all evidence, a grand jury may conclude that the gun discharged accidentally.

2. Suicide. The victim caused his/her own death on purpose. This may not always be straightforward. For instance, a victim may strangle himself accidentally during autoerotic behavior (apparently some people find a certain amount of hypoxia very stimulating). If the examiner were not to consider all of the evidence (such as erotic literature found near the body), an incorrect determination of "suicide by hanging" might be made. This error may be financially disastrous for the victim's survivors, since many life insurance policies do not award benefits when the insured is a suicide. Also, in some cultures suicide is a social stigma or a sin against its deity.

3. Accidental. In this manner of death, the individual falls victim to a hostile environment. Some degree of human negligence may be involved in accidental deaths, but the magnitude of the negligence falls short of that reasonably expected in negligent homicide. Whereas the negligence of the speeding drunk, above, would be considered gross by a reasonable observer, a pedestrian killed at the same intersection by a sober driver, not speeding or running a red light, would be reasonably considered a victim of accidental death.

4. Natural causes. Here, the victim dies in the absence of an environment reasonably considered hostile to human life. Most bodies referred for forensic examination represent this manner of death. We will consider the major diseases producing sudden death below.

5. Undetermined. At the time of the autopsy, there was no clear manner of death. Usually, the ME will go back and amend the undetermined manner of death after completion of tests run on the body or parts thereof.

(Adapted from: http://www.shoestring-graphics.com/CP2020/medtech/doctype/forensic.htm )