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Alabama Sudden Unexplained Infant Death Investigation (SUIDI) Team

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) describes a very specific type of natural cause death in infants from one month to one year old in which all external contributing causes are eliminated through complete autopsy and toxicology, review of the clinical history, and thorough death scene investigation. Sudden Unexplained Infant Death (SUID) is a much broader term used to describe sudden infant deaths from a variety of both internal and external causes. SIDS is a very specific type of SUID and it has become increasingly evident that the majority of infant deaths diagnosed as SIDS in recent years would have been more appropriately diagnosed as SUID cases.

In 2005, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) established a comprehensive, unified approach to the investigation of SUIDs. This approach to investigating SUID was then developed into a universal data collection form and a corresponding training course that was given across the U.S. The individuals that received the initial training were selected from each state and were tasked with taking the training back to their home state. This effort is known as the CDC Sudden Unexplained Infant Death Investigation (SUIDI) Initiative.

The current Alabama SUIDI Team, which includes the both the ACDRS Director and myself, has developed a one-day training course based on the CDC SUIDI curriculum. The course is designed to cover the different types of SUIDs. Additional subjects include infant growth and development, interviewing techniques, scene investigation and photography relating to sleeping environments, and doll reenactment. The doll reenactment is used for the caregiver to give a more accurate demonstration of how the infant is placed to sleep and then discovered.

In 2008 the Team recruited 14 individuals from across the state to serve as regional trainers and trained them to deliver the entire course. The trainers will provide the one-day course to individuals and agencies that are involved in the investigation of infant deaths. The goal of the state SUIDI Team and trainers is to give as many as 80 training sessions during 2009.

Our hope is that, as first responders throughout the state are trained in the SUIDI protocols and use of the SUIDI Form, infant death scene investigation and the information collected will greatly improve. This will lead to more accurate death diagnoses which, in turn, will more effectively inform prevention efforts such as those initiated or supported by ACDRS. We are proud to be involved in this import effort.