The challenge of the medical examiner/coroner (ME/C) in determining cause and manner of death is both complex and individualized. In some cases, the cause is relatively simple (e.g., gunshot wound, severe trauma), whereas in others it may be much more difficult (e.g., drug-related/induced). In the latter, an individual's medical history and autopsy findings must be evaluated along with the report of drugs used, both licit and illicit. The experience of the ME/C needs to be integrated with systematic inductive reasoning to achieve a supportable outcome that serves the public.

The current study provides an excellent means of classifying deaths thought to be drug related. Deaths involving oxycodone were examined in a very thorough manner. Only culled and reliable case data were incorporated into the study's final results. A forensic pathologist reviewed each case so that natural disease processes were considered in determining if they caused or were examined in a very thorough manner. Only culled and reliable case data were incorporated into the study's final results. The algorithm presented and utilized for these cases to arrive at a specific category relating oxycodone to the death is a useful instrument that could have broad applicability to the classification and reporting of deaths involving other drugs.

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