

# A First for Forensic Anthropology at a Texas Crime Lab

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Texas medical examiners' office is the first in the nation to get an international accreditation for its forensic anthropology work. The Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences was recognized by the American National Standards Institute-American Society of Quality (ANSI-ASQ) National Accreditation Board for a period of three years, the laboratory confirmed to *Forensic Magazine*.

The anthropology disciplines were added to the Texas lab in 2006, and have proved instrumental in forensic investigations. The disciplines can be especially useful when determining information from bone samples: analyzing unknown skeletal remains, and working with the medical examiner to assess bone fractures and injuries in trauma deaths, officials at the agency said.

“Anthropologists work alongside forensic pathologists as an integral part of a team of experts dedicated to analysis of cause, manner and mechanism of death in a variety of cases, such as accidental deaths, suicides and homicides, especially fatal child abuse,” said Dwayne A. Wolf, M.D., HCIFS deputy chief medical examiner.

The institute also trains doctorate-level anthropologists in forensic investigation – one of just a handful nationwide that do so, they added.

“The Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences is one of a very few medical examiner offices in the country with a fully integrated Anthropology Division, and now we are the only one in the nation to be accredited by this international program,” Sanchez added.

The accreditation was achieved after a two-day inspection of the facility and operations, which totaled more than 300 requirements. Those requirements included academic qualifications of the staff, specimen handling, and overall quality assurance, among other factors.

“As this role has developed, we have come to appreciate anthropologists' dedication to scientific principles and objectivity. It's not surprising that this dedication has now been formally recognized by the accrediting board,” added Wolf.

Harris County, which includes the city of Houston, is the most populous in Texas – and the third biggest in the country.

“Accreditation is a testament to the high standards and high-caliber contribution that Forensic Anthropology makes to forensic death investigation in Harris County, Luis Sanchez, chief medical examiner and executive director of the lab.