

## Sandy Wilson

---

**From:** Lauren Scharf <LScharf@kxrm.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, February 17, 2022 12:51 PM  
**To:** Sandy Wilson  
**Subject:** MEDIA REQUEST

**CAUTION: This email originated from outside the El Paso County technology network. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe. Please call IT Customer Support at 520-6355 if you are unsure of the integrity of this message.**

---

Good afternoon,

I would like to request the autopsy report for 19-year-old Kara Nichols.

Kind regards,  
Lauren Scharf  
FOX21 News



**EL PASO COUNTY CORONER  
2741 EAST LAS VEGAS STREET  
COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO 80906**

NAME: NICHOLS, Kara

COUNTY: EL PASO

Date of Birth:

Age: 19

AUTOPSY NO: 22-0171

AUTOPSY DATE: 2/8/2022

Sex: Female

Ht: 68"

Wt: 92 lbs.

BEGAN: 0900

MD: Leon Kelly, M.D.

DATE OF PRONOUNCEMENT: 2/7/2022

TIME OF PRONOUNCEMENT: 0122

Identified by: Dental comparisons

---

**FINAL DIAGNOSIS:**

- I. Asphyxia due to strangulation:
  - A. Decomposed remains of a young adult Caucasian female placed in 3 layers of duct tape sealed, black plastic contractor bags, and buried 3-4 feet below the ground surface
  - B. A reported witness to the death relayed to a third party that he "accidentally killed an escort a couple years prior to that, and ultimately buried her on his mother's farm" and that he "accidentally strangled her" while they were "having sex"
  - C. Body discovered in the exact location and condition as described and relayed by the witness
  - D. No identifiable anatomic cause of death
  
- II. Probable heroin intoxication:
  - A. Reported history of heroin abuse
  - B. Morphine to codeine ration greater than 1.0 in post-mortem tissue<sup>1</sup>

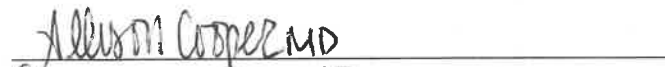
**OPINION:** It is my opinion that Kara Nichols, a 19-year-old Caucasian female, died as a result of asphyxia due to strangulation. The decedent was first reported missing on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2012. The advanced degree of decomposition precludes the possibility of an anatomic diagnosis of strangulation. Furthermore, the decedent's young age at the time of her death resulted in neck structures remaining cartilaginous and unlikely to exhibit evidence of injury. The absence of any other definitive cause of death in the setting of statements reporting "strangulation" are consistent with asphyxia due to strangulation. There is widespread and foundational agreement in the medical examiner professional community in the "fundamental premise that manner of death is circumstance dependent, not autopsy dependent" and that "the manner of death as determined by the forensic pathologist is an opinion based on the known facts concerning the circumstances leading up to and surrounding the death, in conjunction with the findings at autopsy and the laboratory tests"<sup>2,3</sup> Therefore, the medical opinion of the forensic pathologist


22-0171


and the certification of cause and manner of death necessitates the use of facts surrounding the death, and not just the autopsy alone. The witness statements of a volitional act causing death, the extreme measures taken to prevent the death from being discovered, and details of the burial which corroborate the validity of the witness statements made concerning cause of death reach a level of "clear and convincing medical/investigative evidence" of a homicide.<sup>2</sup>

**MANNER OF DEATH: Homicide**


  
LEON KELLY, M.D.

  
ALLISON COOPER, M.D.

  
JAROD MURDOCH, D.O.

  
MEGAN KLIESNER, M.D.

  
DANIEL LINGAMFELTER, D.O.

  
EMILY RUSSELL, M.D.  
February 25<sup>th</sup> 2022

LK

1. Ellis, A.; McGwin, G.; Davis, G.; Dye, D. Identifying cases of heroin toxicity where 6-acetylmorphine (6-AM) is not detected by toxicological analyses. *Forensic Sci Med Pathol.* 2016, 12:243-247.
2. Hanzlick, R. National Association of Medical Examiner: A Guide for Manner Determination, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition. February 2002.
3. Dimaio V. J., DiMaio, D. Forensic Pathology, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. CRC Press LLC, 2001. Pg. 4.

**PERSONS PRESENT AT AUTOPSY**

El Paso County Sheriff Office Detectives Jennifer Arndt, Kat Huston, Brig Barker, and Mike Callis, District Attorney's Office Investigator Jeff Nohr, District Attorney's Office Interns Witley Waterkotte and Joseph Castillo, and Metro Crime Lab Technician Brooke Bell are present for the postmortem examination.

**GENERAL EXAMINATION/CIRCUMSTANCES OF RECOVERY**

The remains are initially discovered approximately 3-4 feet below the surface of the soil in a clandestine grave and are received at the coroner's office in approximately the condition they were discovered with the exception of unintentional traumatic removal of the right arm during excavation. The body is received at the morgue lying prone (face down) as it was discovered in the grave, sealed in 3 separate layers of black plastic contractor bags. There are 3 pairs (6 total bags) of black plastic trash bags which encircle the upper and lower halves of the body respectively and are sealed with 2-3 horizontally circumferential wrappings of gray duct tape at the bag junctions around the level of the thighs. Each of the 3 layers of paired bags are sealed with identical appearing gray duct tape. The portions of bag extending down the right side of the body were torn open during excavation which also traumatically amputated the right upper extremity at the distal humerus and caused fractures of the proximal radius and ulna and a 5 x 5 cm laceration of the right forearm. The amputated forearm, wrist, and hand are received within the body bag but outside of the trash bags. Each black plastic bag measures approximately 41 x 32" and are identical in appearance. Recovered in the body bag is the previously removed clear plastic point of purchase duct tape product wrapper.

Each layer of duct tape and trash bags are removed revealing the severely decomposed remains of a young adult, Caucasian female, 68 inches tall, weighing 92 lbs, and appearing compatible with the stated age of 19 years. The deceased is clad in a black hooded sweatshirt with block lettering stating "PINK", a black bra, unbuttoned and unzipped black jeans pulled up to the mid to upper buttock, underwear with pink block lettering, a pair of black and multicolored fabric slipper boots (the right toe portion torn and loose in the body bag), and a white halter top which is received pulled partially down the trunk. Received separately in the body bag is a heavily soiled white sock and a heavily soiled white tank top. Jewelry consists of 2 transdermal posts over the lower back, an umbilicus ring with dangling wires, a gray metal post lip piercing, and a grey metal left ear post.

Full body radiographs are examined revealing items consistent with jewelry, bra underwires, zippers and bra clips. No projectiles are identified.

Evidence collected at autopsy (6 black plastic trash bags, duct tape wrapper plastic from inside the inner trash bags near feet, 6 layers of duct tape, both hands, fingernails from both hands, swabs from the neck, oral cavity, vaginal cavity, and anus, and DNA hair standards) as well as all clothing, glue on eyelashes, and jewelry are released to Brooke Bell of the Metro crime lab at the time of the autopsy. The decedent's jaw is subsequently released to the crime lab on February 15, 2022.

## **EXTERNAL EXAMINATION**

There is advanced decomposition with partial liquefaction of the body and facial landmarks. There is generalized green–brown discoloration of the skin throughout with darker discoloration of the skin of the face and neck consistent with prone lividity distribution. The skin is devoid of defects (other than noted on the upper right extremity) and there is no evidence of postmortem insect activity or animal predation. The skin texture and coloration of the trunk and extremities reflects the coarse wrinkling of the trash bags resulting in a variegated and mottled appearance of lividity that is without discernible distribution. The medial right thigh exhibits patchy white mold. Rigor mortis is completely absent. The deceased has blond scalp hair measuring approximately 30 inches in maximum length. The eyes are present but the cornea, irides, and conjunctivae exhibit marked cloudiness and a diffuse green–brown discoloration. Petechiae are not discernible due to decomposition. Glue-on false eyelashes are recovered from the eyelids. The ears, nose, lips, and external auditory canals are unremarkable beyond decompositional breakdown of the oral mucosa and partial liquefactive obliteration of the facial features and anatomic structures. The mouth has natural dentition in fair condition. The external genitalia and perineum are unremarkable female and without discernible trauma.

There are multi-colored nails of right hand fingers 2, 3, and 5 and left hand fingers 1 and 3 which are removed at the nail beds. The other fingernails are absent at the nail beds.

The flexor aspect of the left wrist has a cartoon space character symbol with a heart. The lateral aspect of the left ankle has a marijuana leaf and “719”.

## **EVIDENCE OF INJURY**

Layered anterior neck dissection reveals only moderate to advanced decomposition which obscures individual muscle layers and anatomic landmarks. No observable trauma is present. The structures of the neck including the hyoid bone and thyroid cartilage are entirely cartilaginous. The hyoid bone is x-rayed after resection revealing no fracture.

Internal examination of the head, trunk, and extremities is without observable trauma.

## **INTERNAL EXAMINATION**

**HEAD:** The scalp is incised and retracted. The scalp, subscalpular area, and skull are unremarkable. The cranial vault is opened revealing thin, tough, pliable dura and no hemorrhage in the epidural, subdural, or subarachnoid spaces. The brain weighs 540 gm and the semi-liquid cerebral hemispheres, midbrain, and pons are symmetrical and grossly unremarkable beyond the changes of decomposition. On cross-section of the brain parenchyma, there is no evidence of intraparenchymal collections of blood. The dura is stripped from the basilar skull and no fractures are found.

**BODY:** The body is opened with a Y-shaped incision. Other than specifically noted below, the organs occupy their usual positions and relationships. The body cavities are free of

adhesions or abnormal collections of fluid.

**NECK:** The hyoid bone and larynx are intact. The airway is patent and there is no evidence of infection or tumor. The tongue is unremarkable. The thyroid gland is not identified due to decomposition.

**CARDIOVASCULAR SYSTEM:** The intimal surface of the abdominal aorta is free of significant atherosclerosis. The heart weighs 50 gm. The heart is tan and semi-liquid with a paste-like consistency that prohibits a detailed examination.

**LUNGS:** The right lung weighs 70 gm and the left lung weighs 70 gm exhibiting an advanced degree of decomposition. The major bronchi are unremarkable. On cross-section, the parenchyma is unremarkable beyond the features of decomposition.

**GASTROINTESTINAL SYSTEM:** The esophagus, stomach, small and large bowel, and appendix are unremarkable. The stomach is empty.

**LIVER:** The liver weighs 330 gm. The capsule is smooth. The parenchyma is light brown with a semi-liquid, paste-like consistency. The gallbladder is not identified due to decomposition.

**PANCREAS:** Not identified

**ADRENAL GLANDS:** Not identified

**SPLEEN:** Not identified

**KIDNEYS:** The right kidney weighs 70 gm and the left kidney weighs 80 gm. The capsules strip with ease revealing smooth cortical surfaces. On cross-section, the cortices appear congested and exhibit well-demarcated corticomedullary junctions. The collecting systems, ureters, and bladder are unremarkable. The urinary bladder is empty.

**UTERUS, TUBES, OVARIES:** Only small remnants of the organs are visible.

LK

**Toxicology Report**  
**El Paso County Coroner's Office**  
**2741 E. Las Vegas Street, Colorado Springs, CO 80906**  
**719-390-2450 MAIN/719-390-2462 FAX**

**Name:** NICHOLS, Kara  
**Doctor:** Leon Kelly M.D.  
**County:** El Paso

**Case #:** 22-00171  
**Date Received:** 02/08/2022  
**Agency#:**

**Alcohols and Volatiles:**

Analyte	Specimen	Result		
ETHANOL	Brain	Negative		
ETHANOL	Muscle	Negative		

**Immunoassay Screen (ELISA):**

Analyte	Specimen	Result		
AMPHETAMINE	Brain	Negative		
BARBITURATES	Brain	Negative		
BENZODIAZEPINE METABOLITES	Brain	Negative		
COCAINE/ BENZOYLECGONINE	Brain	Negative		
FENTANYL	Brain	Negative		
METHADONE	Brain	Negative		
METHAMPHETAMINE	Brain	Negative		
OPIATES	Brain	Positive		
OXYCODONE	Brain	Negative		
THCCOOH	Brain	Negative		
TRAMADOL	Brain	Negative		
TRICYCLIC ANTIDEPRESSANTS	Brain	Negative		
ZOLPIDEM	Brain	Negative		

**Qualitative Results:**

Analyte	Specimen	Result		
6-ACETYLMORPHINE	Brain	Not Detected		

**Toxicology Report**  
**El Paso County Coroner's Office**  
**2741 E. Las Vegas Street, Colorado Springs, CO 80906**  
**719-390-2450 MAIN/719-390-2462 FAX**

**Name:** NICHOLS, Kara  
**Doctor:** Leon Kelly M.D.  
**County:** El Paso

**Case #:** 22-00171  
**Date Received:** 02/08/2022  
**Agency#:**

6-ACETYLMORPHINE	Muscle	Not Detected		
6-ACETYLMORPHINE	Liver	Not Detected		

**Quantitative Results:**

Analyte	Specimen	Result		
CODEINE	Brain	36 ng/g		
MORPHINE free	Brain	415 ng/g		
CODEINE	Muscle	68 ng/g		
MORPHINE free	Muscle	1115 ng/g		
CODEINE	Liver	59 ng/g		
MORPHINE free	Liver	591 ng/g		

**Comments:**

Liver and Muscle analyzed -- Final report 2/16/2022

---

**Reviewed By:** Andrea K Tully MSc    **Date Released:** 02/11/22    **Reviewed By:** Leon Kelly M.D.

  
Reviewer Signature

  
Reviewer Signature