



**FROM CRIME SCENE TO COURTROOM:  
THE MURDER ROOM™**  
A SCIENTIFIC, MULTIDISCIPLINARY,  
VICTIM-CENTERED DEATH INVESTIGATION APPROACH

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Death investigation can be a very complicated process. Without the selection and implementation of a proven death investigation method, it is arguable that the risk of failure increased exponentially. And because selected investigatory system determines the investigatory outcome, the quality, the breadth and depth, and success of death investigations are a reflection of the education, training, and experience of the investigator combined with selection and implementation of death investigation method.

Death investigations are typically conducted (a) using a correct methodology, (b) using an incorrect methodology or (c) not using any methodology at all. Investigators who select a correct death investigation methodology for the circumstances are more likely to be successful and achieve resolution in the case in relation to their education, training, and death investigation experience as opposed to investigators who select an incorrect method for the circumstances or do not use a method at all even if they are highly educated, well trained, and have ample death investigation experience. Investigators who use no systematic method of inquiry are not actually investigating at all because the very definition of investigate is to "carry out a systematic or formal inquiry to discover and examine the facts of so as to establish the truth" (Google Dictionary, n.d., para. 1).

Proper death investigation system selection is paramount to success prosecution in criminal death cases. Incorrect system selection or non-systematic approaches to criminal death investigation often leads to limited results, incorrect results, incomplete results, complete failure, cold cases, undetermined manner of death situations, and non-prosecutability of criminal acts. To date, few death investigation methodologies have a proven recipe for solvability and clearance from crime scene to courtroom. While there are numerous excellent methods that address one or more components of death investigation, many of them are limited by quantitative or qualitative constraints or are limited in breadth and depth in general. However, without a doubt the most dangerous of the three is by far the non-systematic or methodless approach to death cases, which is most often due to technical ignorance, but rarely due to malicious neglect.

### **From Crime Scene to Courtroom: Pettler's Invention of The Murder Room™**

Since 2015 with the publication of Pettler's Victim-Centered Death Investigation Methodology™, investigators worldwide continue to hear the call to abandon antiquated, suspect-based or methodless investigation models. Commitment continues to grow for the adoption of scientific, multidisciplinary, victim-centered death investigation methods. **Scientific investigation** is the systematic development of sophisticated, multistage organizational plan for quantitative and qualitative data collection, plan implementation using research-based data collection instruments, and analysis of collected data for the purpose of answering a question. **Multidisciplinary investigation** is the integration of various disciplines from forensic science, behavioral science, and social science to incorporate the diverse perspectives their study from the viewpoint of more than one discipline individually bring to each piece of evidence towards the illustrated quantification of cause of death, manner of death, medical evidence, physical and biological evidence, and behavioral and sociological evidence for the purpose of answering a question and/or identifying themes. And a **victim-centered approach** places investigatory focus on the analytical study of the victim in totality as an individual and in relation to the evidence, themes and case-related issues.

Therefore, a **scientific, multidisciplinary, victim-centered death investigation** method is the sophisticated, organizational multidisciplinary system designed and implemented for the identification, collection, comprehension, application, analysis, and synthesis of quantitative and qualitative evidence and data for the purpose of evaluating cause of death, manner of death, death scene characteristics, forensic evidence, behavioral evidence, and sociological evidence individually and in comparison to individual elements and the totality of the victimological, suspectological, and witness studies in a death case.

Today, LPA uses an expanded version of VCDIM called *The Murder Room™*, a scientific multidisciplinary, victim-centered approach from crime scene to courtroom for first responders all the way to prosecutors. TMR is a logical,

structurally sound conceptual death investigation method designed to preserve investigators' metacognition throughout the process as they pursue investigatory objectives using creative micro-method data and artifact generation, collection, analysis, and synthesis tools to evaluate individual items and the totality of evidence in whole in relation to the victim, the subject, and the victim-subject relationship to achieve investigatory outcomes towards contribution of query resolution. Based in Hegelian dialectic philosophy, The Murder Room™ method's results are interpretive in nature, in which means the (a) thesis, *the proposed contradiction between the victim and the subject*, and the (b) antithesis, *the assembly of contradictory evidence into a conflating yet contrasting explanation* are (c) reconciled individually and cumulatively resolved through synthesis or "a higher level of truth" (Collins Dictionary, n.d., para 1). TMR is a hierarchal taxonomic arrangement of nominal to ratio-level investigatory stages with specific built-in failsafes that prevent individual stage or total system failure. Theoretical framework is the skeleton or the scaffolding of investigatory methods. The purpose of scaffolding is to systematically organize and rank-order investigatory procedures within the canon of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Benjamin Bloom's 1956 six-stage Hierarchy of Cognitive Domains otherwise known as "Bloom's Taxonomy" is the scaffolding for TMR's six-stage method (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956).

TMR begin with gathering knowledge to comprehend the death of the victim towards application of analytical processes to study the victim, crime scene, lab reports, autopsy, suspect, and witnesses in order to sequester white noise and to synthesize extracted critical evidence so we can empirically conclude and report interrelationships, new information, theories, findings, recommendations and options, manner of death requests to amend when applicable, and to propose case resolution. Pursuant to investigatory metacognition throughout the process, each stage of TMR contains a rank-ordered series of micro-methods or that are dripped one-by-one from the beginning of the stage through the end. Completion of Stage 1: Micro-Method 1 is required to reach Stage 1: Micro-Method 2 and so on. Completion of Stage 1 micro-methods unlocks Stage 2 and so forth concluding with evaluation of Stages 1-5 in Stage 6. The step-by-step

micro-method drip method keeps investigators on an evolutionary track preventing them from skipping steps, jumping stages, and/or from drawing premature conclusions at any time during Stages 1-5. That is, before they arrive on the death scene, while processing the death scene, while attending the autopsy, during individual evidentiary analysis, death scene reconstruction, and synthesis of critical evidence.

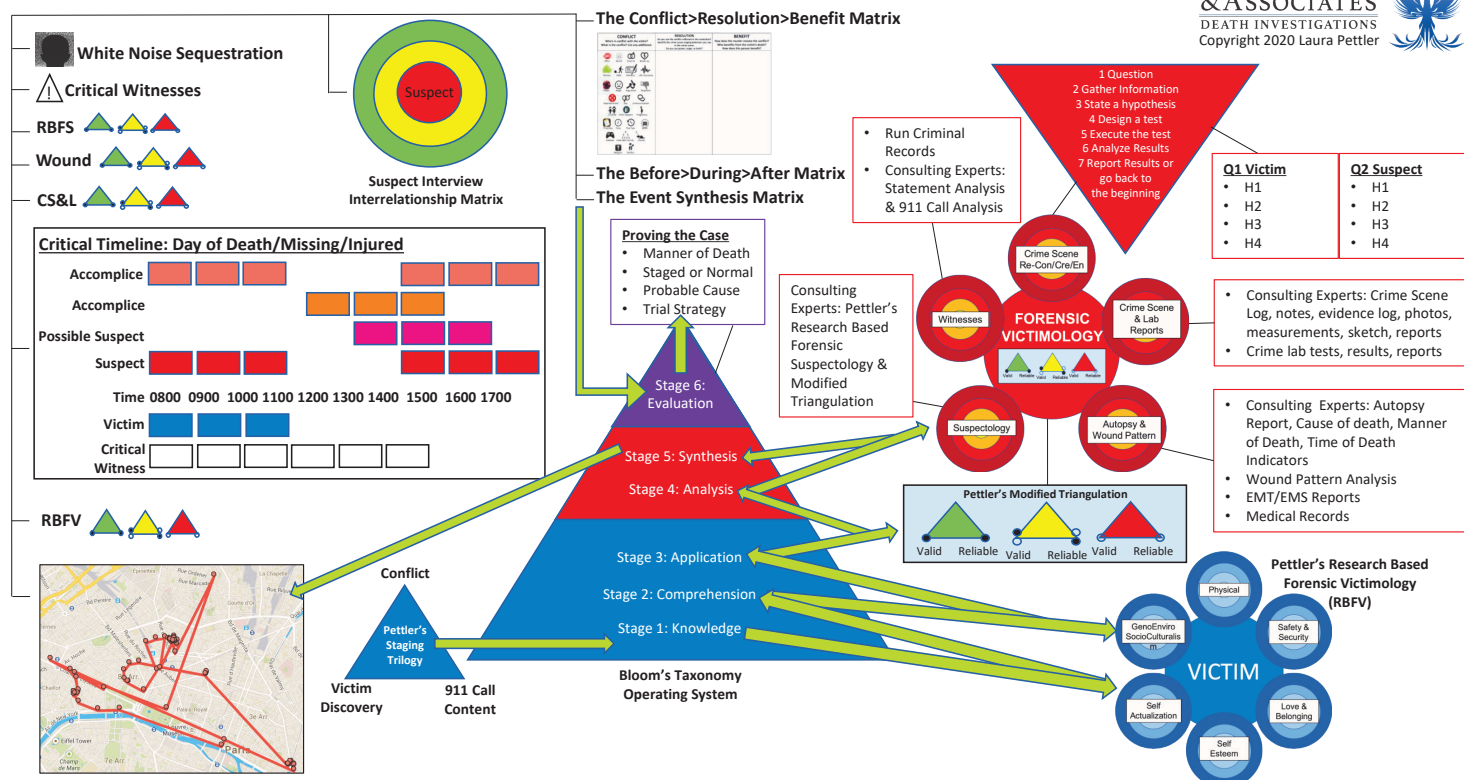
Investigatory form *should* follow function, but many death investigations don't. The very first thing in a death investigation that must happen is the selection of an investigatory method that will organize and plan data collection. When data is collected haphazardly, it is very difficult to sort through, process, and use. When data is collected systematically using a standardized method, processing becomes much easier and data potential is realized more often. It is important to remember that the selected system must match the investigatory purpose. Raw data collected with regard to the necessity of collection instrumentation validity and reliability, data processing, valid and reliable metric design, and integration of scientific methodology aimed at maximizing objectivity and minimizing investigator bias both independently and in interagency collaboration towards congruency increases the likelihood of achieving the investigatory outcomes. Though this might, upon cursory review, appear rigid and static, contrarily, TMR is flexible and variable. Grounded by the empirical research constructs of validity (i.e., the ability of the instrument to measure what it is intended to measure) and reliability (i.e., the ability to apply the results to the intended population), TMR can be adapted to unique circumstances without sacrificing internal checks and balances or overriding fail-safes.

In addition to all of the above, in 2019, Dr. Pettler developed individualized adaptations of TMR for non-staged or potentially staged cases and two investigatory versions of TMR:

- **Hot Case** – new death case under active investigation
- **Cold Case** – old death case under active investigation

Though death case clearance rates, meaning cases that are closed by manner of death resolution, by arrest, by plea bargain, by conviction, or even abatement are solely reflec-

## The Murder Room: Scientific Victim-Centered Death Investigation–Staging (TMR-VCDIM-S)



tive of jurisdictional agency process and procedure, discretion, objectives, and legalities respectively. In totality, TMR is an outstanding standard operating procedure for homicide investigation as it boasts a 98% solve rate. That is, arrival at accurate manner of death determination, establishment of nonstaged and staged case characteristics, event dynamics, homicidal pattern, offender characteristics, offender profile, and/or correct suspect identification. Death investigation requires systematic inquiry in order to be successful under circumstances where questions are raised about how the victim died, when the victim died, where, why, and by what mechanisms. Investigators are wise to resource many eclectic sources in order to arrive at the truth. TMR is a system of eclectic metrics, micro-methods, and tools that can aid investigators all the way through prosecutors from crime scene to courtroom. ©

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For more information, visit Laura Pettler & Associates' website [LPAteam.com](http://LPAteam.com)

To enroll the LPA International Forensics Institute's online course, The Murder Room, please visit [LPAIFI.com](http://LPAIFI.com) and to enroll in Dr. Pettler's 2021 Webinar Series.

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