

Diary of a murder detective

Published on 25 July 2024 Written by Detective sergeant Jugdeep Atwal, Metropolitan Police Service

Jugdeep Atwal shares what it's like working as a detective sergeant in a major investigation team (MIT).

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I am one of four detective sergeants on a major investigation team (MIT) within the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). The MPS has 20 MITs, which provide advice to local policing teams in relation to unexplained deaths and homicide investigations. The teams perform an 'on-call' function, known locally as the homicide advice team (HAT), who ultimately determine whether there are any suspicious circumstances. This diary covers one of my HAT weeks, which occur every five weeks.

Tuesday

This is my first day of HAT. The team is split into core shifts of earlies, lates and nights. I am working lates, which is 15:00 to 23:00. I manage the phone, taking calls for advice from our local area, alongside managing my day-to-day workload and staff supervision. I am dealing with ongoing investigations, communication with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and counsel, and reading evidential material from the cases I am managing.

Wednesday

We receive a call at 20:00 about a deceased male found in his flat after not being seen for a week. The local police team raised concerns and there appeared to be signs of a disturbance at the flat.

When we arrive at the premises it transpires that the deceased had a cat which had caused the disturbance by knocking over plant pots. There were no signs of theft. This death will remain with local officers unless the post-mortem indicates that there is an involvement from a third party. I return to base, write up the advice and leave at around 01:00.

Thursday

It feels as if I've just sat down when the phone rings. A deceased female has been found in an area of overgrown vegetation in a residential area with access to a busy A road. She is naked. I head to the scene with an exhibits officer and two inquiry officers. My immediate action is to obtain a briefing from the local officers. This helps me to understand the situation, their concerns and any initial investigation actions that have already been carried out.

I task the exhibits officers to liaise with the scenes of crime officers (SOCO) to assist with retrieving discarded clothing that may belong to the victim or a potential suspect. The team quickly identify the deceased and an intelligence report is obtained which highlights that she had been to a local hospital and walked to the bus stop from there. CCTV shows her being led off a bus by a man, taken to the vegetation area and then he leaves alone. This is now a homicide investigation.

Friday

The team are called in for an 08:00 briefing relating to yesterday's homicide. Our main priority is to identify the suspect. I task officers with arranging a download of CCTV from the bus. This footage shows the suspect using a bank card to pay for the fare.

I dispatch officers to Transport for London offices to obtain Oyster card details, which include travel details and where the card is topped up. The aim of these enquiries is to identify a pattern of life and a possible home address.

Saturday

A clear image of the suspect is obtained from the bus CCTV. Due to the nature of the offence, a decision is made to release the image to the public. This is an unusual approach but steps must be taken to protect the public, even if it means the suspect is unduly alerted. Protection of the public is paramount.

Late that evening the image is published across traditional media outlets and social media.

Sunday

Overnight, a message is posted on social media identifying the suspect and the location where they live and work. An arrest team apprehend the suspect and arrest him for murder. He is met at the

custody suite by the interview team who take fingerprints, DNA and intimate swabs. He provides a 'no comment' interview.

The case is sent to the CPS who authorise a charge of murder. The suspect is remanded into custody to attend the magistrates' court.

Monday

The suspect is put before the magistrate and remanded into custody to attend the Central Criminal Court 48 hours after this hearing. Our work now begins to collate the evidence. Time is of the essence as many new CCTV systems have traded the quality of recording for a short period of storage.

The team will now work together to obtain witness statements, produce telephone schedules, CCTV footage and perform their disclosure obligation. Generally, the subsequent trial will take place 6 to 12 months later.

This investigation was concluded quite quickly thanks to CCTV and the media appeal. The team are currently managing 10 live investigations, with additional cases that are progressing through to court hearings. However, there is no 'typical' HAT week as the work comes in peaks and troughs.

- This article was peer reviewed by Detective Inspector Juliet Faram, South Yorkshire Police

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