

BOOK REVIEW

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A Review of Modern Legal Medicine, Psychiatry, and Forensic Science

REFERENCE: Curran, W. J., McGarry, A. L., and Petty, C. S., *Modern Legal Medicine, Psychiatry, and Forensic Science*, F. A. Davis, Philadelphia, 1980, 1287 pages + index, \$79.50.

"Where does a 3050-g, 7.5-cm-thick textbook come to rest? Anywhere it wants to," to paraphrase the old joke—but preferably, for this book, on the ready reference shelf of every pathologist who does forensic science cases, and certainly in the library of every forensic pathology training program. The authors of this weighty compendium state that it is "the first comprehensive single volume work covering the entire field of legal medicine and the allied forensic sciences." Although it may not live up to that claim of universality, it does appear to be the first major single-volume textbook on forensic pathology and forensic science in this country since the classic 1954 edition of Gonzales et al (not counting Professor Camps' updates of Gradwohl [1968 and 1976], which are British in orientation, nor the recent multivolume work of Tedeschi et al [1977]).

The three authors represent the disciplines cited in the title. Dr. Petty is an eminent forensic pathologist from Dallas who in his introduction states that he has set out to produce "a readable book that is practical and usable"—and that he has done in the forensic pathology portions. Dr. McGarry, a noted psychiatrist experienced in forensic aspects of psychiatry, in his preface admits that "no single volume text can be totally exhaustive of every field covered"—and that is indeed true of this book, although he has selected for the psychiatry portions some interesting chapters that are of concern to practicing pathologists and others involved with the judicial system. Professor Curran, a distinguished professor of medical jurisprudence at Harvard, has provided philosophic oversight to the entire work, citing in his comments that "the unifying source was the courts, the administration of justice, not the sciences themselves," and in his several chapters he attempts to relate the technical information to its larger purpose in our criminal and civil justice systems.

Unfortunately, there was not a fourth major author who was a specialist in forensic science or criminalistics. The reference value of the book would have been greatly enhanced by a supervising author who would have ridden a little tighter herd on the forensic science chapters. That is not a fatal defect, all things considered, since obviously Dr. Petty has brought to bear upon that section his considerable knowledge of the forensic sciences. The authors also admit that they have not included "certain aspects of police science, such as ballistics, fingerprinting, or the general aspects of witness interrogation, nor separate chapters on anthropology and personal identification." Unfortunately, the reader must read

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the introduction in order to find out that these significant omissions were by intent and that he will not find several important subjects covered in what otherwise purports to be an inclusive volume. Exhumation, for example, is mentioned only in a passing reference on p. 1071 in the toxicology section. The reader will also have difficulty finding anything pertaining to arson investigation, forensic radiology, and electrocution.

These omissions, however, are more than counterbalanced by excellent chapters that can be found interspersed with others that are not so great. The initial chapters, on the history, development, and ethical standards for the forensic science professions, are important reminders for us all of the halting and erratic development of forensic sciences in Europe and this country, especially as compared with the other great advances in medicine and technology.

Part II is devoted to forensic pathology and covers everything from fundamental autopsy procedures to an excellent chapter on "Practical Perspectives," which is a rich source of basic philosophy for a forensic pathology trainee. Other chapters deal with the usual technical subjects concerning types of death, with an excellent section on asphyxial death that includes a vivid historical description of a judicial hanging. Other chapters deal with automobile and aircraft accidents, thermal deaths, and so forth. One of the best chapters in the book is that concerning death resulting from firearms. Certain idiosyncracies, of course, creep into the text, such as the use of "inshoot" and "outshoot" for what most people consider "entrance" and "exit" wounds, but one can forgive an author for lapsing into jargon in today's world. (The authors in their introduction also refer to their 53 contributing authors as "spokepeople"!)

Professor Curran's chapters at the end of each major section of the book concerning the presentation of evidence in court are excellent, and they serve to remind the reader of the ultimate reason that we are involved in forensic science in the first place. One minor quibble with Professor Curran is his repetitive reference to "color slides" as being good demonstrative evidence: one gets the impression that he has not recently had occasion to go through the struggle of setting up a slide projector in a courtroom, or he might find that good color prints are much superior as an exhibit for the jury and the record.

Part III, entitled "Special Investigations," contains chapters concerning deaths in medical institutions and nursing homes, deaths of concern to public health authorities, and unusual situations such as transplantation of organs and multiple death investigations—all of which are important to the understanding of the place of forensic science in our society. Also in Part III is a reasonably good chapter concerning sex-related deaths, although a reader desiring more detailed references on that topic will be disappointed: the only two citations are to Jacques Barzun and the Marquis de Sade! There are also three chapters concerning rape, one of which is useful for the technical knowledge involved in examining an alleged rape victim. The other two are about the psychology of the "rapee" which, while perhaps interesting, are not really to the point. A title such as "The Rape Experience" does little to enhance the technical value or the dignity of this book.

The portion of the book devoted to forensic psychiatry and psychology contains a mixture of chapters of some importance to forensic scientists and others that would appeal only to a psychiatrist or psychologist. Those on "the anti-social personality," "pedophilia," and the "psychological aspects of suicide," would seem to be pertinent. Other chapters concerning "psychological testing" and "mental retardation and the law," among others, while perhaps of interest to behavioral scientists, will not contain much of interest to the forensic pathologist or criminalist. Again, at the conclusion of this portion, Professor Curran and Dr. McGarry have a chapter upon the presentation of psychiatric findings in court. Attention should be called to their incisive paragraph entitled "The Vulnerability of the Professional Narcissist" (p. 971): all of us could benefit by reading that!

The final portion of the book concerns the forensic sciences. This portion is the most disorganized and incomplete. The chapter on toxicology is quite good and informative,

although there is a typographical error in the units of measurement for which the reader must be alert. The section on forensic dentistry is fairly good, emphasizing primarily dental identification and the recognition of dental injuries in cases of child abuse. There is very little concerning bite marks, however, and there are no photos of that increasingly important subject. A separate chapter concerning identification procedures is well done, and in 14 pages covers the topic quite completely. A final chapter by Professor Curran concerning courtroom presentation of forensic science testimony again presents the integrating philosophy of this book. The other chapters in Part V leave considerable to be desired. They include the number of square feet required for a forensic science laboratory (30 pages) and all you wanted to know about voice prints (34 pages), the vagaries of the polygraph (19 pages), and questioned document examination (47 pages!), but, unfortunately, more significant forensic science disciplines are omitted.

Modern Legal Medicine, Psychiatry, and Forensic Science is destined to take its place upon our reference bookshelves as another classic textbook. It contains a great deal of factual information, data, and references as well as a considerable amount of interesting but relatively unimportant material. Its principal problem is its bulk: it could easily be separated into two or three separate volumes, each of which would be easier to handle and therefore more likely to be consulted. The natural evolution, however, of well-accepted textbooks seems to be that they split into two or more volumes in successive editions, so perhaps that will happen with this one. It would seem likely that this significant new work will go into future editions, and the hope is that some of the rough edges of this first edition will be smoothed over and some of the significant omissions will be remedied. In sum, this is a most worthy addition to the textbooks of forensic pathology, forensic psychiatry, and other forensic sciences, and it should be consulted by those who practice—and those who litigate—in those fields.