

BOOK REVIEW

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A Review of *Forensic Sciences*

REFERENCE: Wecht, C., Ed., *Forensic Sciences*, Matthew Bender, 235 E. 45th St., New York, NY 10017, 1981, 3 volumes, 1996 pages, no price listed.

This three volume set was written for attorneys so they could obtain a basic understanding of legal medicine and the forensic sciences for use in criminal and civil cases. The topics are relevant and the information is current and the major divisions of forensic science are included.

The volumes are in hardbound large binders which allow the pages to be laid open easily on a desk top or courtroom table and are designed for additional supplements to be added as the information is updated through annual revisions and supplements. Eight chapters have been reserved to provide the necessary space for these additions.

Twenty-seven authors, the majority of whom are attorneys, have written chapters concerning their respective areas of expertise. Topics include forensic pathology, anthropology, toxicology, odontology, serology, criminalistics, bloodstain examinations, firearm identification, illustrative testimony, legal procedures and trial techniques for obtaining and using expert testimony, and a list of expert witnesses. Most chapters are well written and within the scope of the major work. A few chapters are highly technical and difficult to comprehend unless the reader has preexisting knowledge of the subject.

Some typographical errors are present and the most troublesome of these are incorrect or misspelled authors' names in references. A major fault lies in the relative paucity of references for most chapters. The most apparent content error is in the chapter on gunshot wounds in which the maximum distance for gunpowder stippling is stated to be 0.61 m (2 ft) (Chapter 25, p. 28). This figure is outdated. The remainder of that paragraph more accurately reflects the variables affecting stippling patterns. The distances at which different types of powder grains will produce stippling varies considerably [1]. Stippling patterns may be seen at ranges of fire up to 1.2 to 1.5 m (4 to 5 ft), although individual grains may travel in excess of 2.4 m (8 ft) [2].

Despite the described deficiencies, these three volumes represent a substantial contribution to the forensic sciences and law literature and should be of tremendous assistance to attorneys requiring the expertise of forensic scientists.

References

- [1] DiMaio, V. J. M., Petty, C. S., and Stone, I. C., Jr., "An Experimental Study of Powder Tattooing of the Skin," *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, Vol. 21, No. 2, April 1976, pp. 367-372.
- [2] Petty, C. S., "Death by Trauma: Blunt and Sharp Instruments and Firearms," in *Modern Legal Medicine Psychiatry and Forensic Science*, W. J. Curran, A. L. McGarry, and C. S. Petty, Eds., F. A. Davis Co., Philadelphia, 1980.

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