

BOOK REVIEW

David K. Wiecking,¹ M.D.

A Review of *Ethics, Legal Medicine and Forensic Pathology*

REFERENCE: Plueckhahn, V. D., *Ethics, Legal Medicine and Forensic Pathology*, Melbourne University Press, 1983, 279 pp., \$44.95.

Ethics, Legal Medicine and Forensic Pathology is as its inclusive title indicates an attempt to incorporate in one small volume of 279 pages all that most any physician would want to know about medical jurisprudence and forensic pathology in the Common Law countries, particularly Australia. The author has taken his lectures from medical school and woven them together in a relatively inclusive text which should be of great value to senior medical students, house officers, and young general practitioners.

The majority of this book is devoted to the medical jurisprudence of Australia. There are extensive citations to the statutory law of Australia and its British forebears. There are also several allusions to relevant law in the United States that are interesting from a comparative law standpoint. It is refreshing throughout this book to remind ourselves of the common sources and the parallels in development of the legal systems of the nations derived from Great Britain.

The portions of this text dealing with the legal and ethical responsibilities of medical practitioners and their relationships to the judicial system can profitably be read by any practitioner and easily translated into the special circumstances of his own jurisdiction. There is a fascinating chapter embodying much history concerning the practice of anatomical dissection for medical knowledge and the development of the legalities surrounding what is now a standard medical educational practice.

About one third of the book concerns forensic pathology. It is a rather superficial treatment of the various types of wounds and injuries that can be inflicted upon the human body and should not be relied upon as inclusive for those who are to practice pathology, but would be a good starting point for the general practitioner. There are several excellent color plates illustrating various types of wounds. Unfortunately they are interspersed throughout the volume requiring cross-reference rather than being arrayed at the pertinent chapter. The chapter on toxicology is very superficial, while that dealing with the physiological effects of alcohol is quite inclusive. There is also a summary chapter on forensic odontology, radiology, and osteology, but again it does nothing more than alert the reader that he should go to a much more authoritative text if he is to use such techniques in day-to-day laboratory examinations. As would be expected, some of the subjects seem of rather unique interest to Australians, such as deaths caused by volcanic eruption, numerous pictures of snake bites, and a discussion of the uniquely British crime of infanticide. Three pages are devoted to gunshot wounds. There is no mention

¹Chief medical examiner, Commonwealth of Virginia, 9 N. 14th St., Richmond, VA 23219.

of injuries as a result of boomerangs. There are numerous citations at the end of each chapter, many as recent as 1982.

This text can be recommended for its designed purpose of instructing medical students and young physicians about the many facets of medical jurisprudence in the Common Law countries, particularly Australia, and the contributions that medicine can make to the scientific investigation and judicial resolution of deaths of public interest.