

BOOK REVIEW

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A Review of *The Coroner's Autopsy*

REFERENCE: Knight, B., *The Coroner's Autopsy*, Churchill Livingstone, 1560 Broadway, New York, NY 10036, 1983, 299 pages, \$24.00.

The subtitle of this book, "A Guide to Non-Criminal Autopsies for the General Pathologist," is sufficient justification for its publication. In Britain, Canada, and, I suspect, the United States, the majority of "coroner's autopsies" are performed by general pathologists operating out of local hospitals. Many of these pathologists have no formal training in forensic pathology and gain experience and hopefully expertise on a case-by-case basis. The difference between a hospital and medicolegal autopsy is essentially one of the approach. The approach to forensic science cases is well-defined in this book.

Within the confines of the objectives of the book the subject matter is well covered. The chapters on the Medicolegal Autopsy and the Pathology of Sudden Death are particularly good. The treatment of Firearm and Explosion Deaths is shallow. Although the author points out that these topics are dealt with in detail in standard texts on forensic pathology, deaths as a result of gunshot injuries in some jurisdictions greatly outnumber cases of accidental or suicidal drownings and categorization of a firearm death as accidental or suicidal may require some expertise on the part of the pathologist to expose such a death as homicidal.

The subject of drowning is well covered. However, the role of potassium release in freshwater drownings may have been overstated in view of clinical investigations on near-drowning cases carried out by Modell. The advice not to pursue diatom testing if the supposed water of immersion is diatom-free is not sound. The reviewer's experience of several cases of homicidal drowning in which the body has subsequently been dumped elsewhere attests to that.

While the schematic diagrams are informative, the standard of photography is poor and unfortunately there are numerous typographical errors in the text. These criticisms of course are correctable in future editions.

In summary, this is an excellent book that should be read and the contents digested by all general pathologists who have occasion to perform coroner's autopsies. Apart from local legal considerations this book is recommended to pathologists on any continent.

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