

BOOK REVIEW

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A Review of *The Essentials of Forensic Medicine: 4th Edition*

REFERENCE: Polson, C. J., Gee, D. J., and Knight, B., *The Essentials of Forensic Medicine: 4th Edition*. Pergamon Press, Fairview Park, Elmsford, NY 10523, 1986, 734 pp., \$180.00.

Dr. C. J. Polson with the assistance of Dr. David Gee, and Dr. Bernard Knight, has produced a fourth edition of his text, *The Essentials of Forensic Medicine*. The book is divided into two unequal parts. The first part, which takes up the majority of the volume, covers the topic of Forensic Pathology, and therefore has general application regardless of what part of the world one practices. The second part of the text is entitled The Law Relating to the Practice of Medicine, and concerns itself with the law governing medical practice within England, and the rest of the British Isles, and Ireland. It has less general application to those practicing elsewhere.

As the preface to the fourth edition indicates both parts have been revised, but the most significant changes are to be found in Part II, governing the legal aspects as they relate to British medical practice.

As to be expected from the authors involved, the book is clearly written and most enjoyable to read. The references at the end of the chapters are extensive and cover both modern and older references. The authors clearly have a wide range of experience and a keen sense of the historic background of their case examples some of which predate the Second World War, and some predate the 20th century, which does not detract from the points to be made by them, and there are also included cases of current vintage. Indeed there is something vivid in citing an incident from Balaclava in a discussion of instantaneous rigor mortis.

The Forensic Pathology portion of the volume deals completely and adequately with those topics most often encountered in forensic medicine to include signs of death, identification, and the various mechanisms of death. By design the authors do not treat deaths as a result of poisons, or drugs specifically, preferring to leave those topics to other volumes. Good balance is given when discussing those areas in which controversy exists. Appropriate warnings of caution are given in those areas wherein interpretation can be difficult.

Abundant case examples are provided to illustrate the principles discussed. The examples available, in a sense, reflect the population involved. Thus, the practitioner in the United States may find that his population has a wider access to various types of firearms than the population served by these authors. While it is undoubtedly true that in the experience of Dr. Polson et al. suicides in females by use of a firearm is a rare event, as stated, in Midwestern

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United States the women would seem less reticent about using that method to terminate their life.

Those photographs included in the book are clear and adequately illustrate the points being made by the authors. There are 14 colored plates provided in the midportion of the volume illustrating several patterned injuries. The greatest portion of the book, as intended by its' writers, is allotted to text. There are few, if any, major errors in the volume. A table of unnatural deaths provided on p. 549 would indicate the number of carbon monoxide poisonings in Leeds increased from 15 examples in 1970 to 1111 examples in 1981. Presumably this represents one of those typographical gremlins which creep in despite the greatest of efforts, rather than a particular calamity befalling Leeds in 1981.

The second part of the volume deals with those laws concerning medical practice including a description of the General Medical Council, which among other matters registers physicians in Britain. Clearly this portion of the book does not have a direct application for those practicing outside of Britain, but may still be read with interest by anyone wishing to compare the means by which other jurisdictions handle the various ways law and medicine touch upon one another. It is interesting to see just how unwieldy the procedure to permit cremation of remains is in England, requiring as it does seven different forms, or to contemplate the trend in Britain to rest the duties of coroner with lawyers rather than physicians.

The Essentials of Forensic Medicine well fulfills the promise of its title. It is a work by which the experienced practitioner in forensic medicine may enjoy comparing the wide range of experience of Drs. Polson, Gee, and Knight with his own. Likewise the student, or the practitioner who infrequently is called upon to handle forensic science matters, may look to this text as an accurate and useful guide in forensic pathology.