

BOOK REVIEW

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A Review of *CAP Handbook for Postmortem Examination of Unidentified Remains*

REFERENCE: Fierro, M. F. and Loring, G. J., Eds., *CAP Handbook for Postmortem Examination of Unidentified Remains*. College of American Pathologists, 5202 Old Orchard Rd., Skokie, IL 60077, 273 pp., \$29.95.

This manual is designed to help the medical examiner or coroner faced with gathering sufficient data to aid in the identification of a deceased person. Despite some drawbacks, the *CAP Handbook* has achieved its goal, particularly for the inexperienced or parttime medical examiner.

The first five chapters concern themselves with general, practical, and conceptual aspects of medicolegal death investigation. However, because of multiple authorship, these chapters are needlessly repetitious. Also, they do not usually address the title and purpose of the handbook. Likewise, Chapter 11 (Medical Evidence and Court Testimony) is nicely written but out of context with the preceding and following chapters. Albeit an important topic, it does not address the purpose of this manual.

The chapters on postmortem radiography, toxicology, anthropology, facial reconstruction, and odontology are excellent. Essentially, they delineate what can be done, and what the medical examiner or coroner can do to preserve and document evidence for the experts in these fields. These chapters appropriately address their respective topics in concert with the purpose of the manual and the target audience.

The final chapter (written with a bit of emotionally tinged editorializing) deals with the extent of the problem of missing persons. It provides much useful information about the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) for Missing and Unidentified Persons, and the NCIC forms are included at the end of the chapter. The Appendix includes numerous body and clothing diagrams, some useful charts concerning height and weight, and the estimation of these parameters from children's clothing.

A major flaw of this handbook is the excessive redundancy. Not only are the first five chapters redundant, but many of the diagrams and charts at the end of these chapters are included in the Appendix. The information on fingerprints is good, but illustrations of both good and bad fingerprints could be helpful to the novice. Likewise, illustrations of a male and female pelvis, age changes of the pubic symphysis, and a chart on the age of epiphyseal unions would have been helpful.

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A strong feature of the book is that it tells the inexperienced medical examiner what can and should be done, and where to get help. In fact, names, addresses, and telephone numbers of the diplomates of several specialty boards are given along with other resources in special fields (for example, fingerprints, facial reconstruction). In general, the *CAP Handbook* should be a valuable reference for the inexperienced or parttime medical examiner and a handy reference for the well-established medical examiner.