

BOOK REVIEW

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A Review of *Poison Detection in Human Organs*

REFERENCE: Curry, A. S., *Poison Detection in Human Organs*, 4th ed. Charles C Thomas, 2600 South First, Springfield, IL 62794-9265, 1988, 335 pp., \$54.00.

As with previous editions of *Poison Detection in Human Organs*, the basic tenet in the book has been kept, which is that the analyst does not know the drug or other toxicant involved in the case, and if you don't look, you don't find.

This edition follows a similar format as the third edition. The first section deals with emergency toxicology in the living patient, including the analysis of blood, urine, gastric lavage, or vomitus. Dr. Curry includes a number of rapid, sensitive spot tests for urine which can be most helpful to the analyst who has little or no information on the poison ingested.

I particularly liked the manner in which he conducts gastric lavage examination with a series of rapid tests and a reminder to us to measure the pH and to smell the contents. In this age of rapidly advancing technology we often omit the obvious. Drug abuse screening has also been added to this section. Although this part of the book has been written for the clinical laboratory analyst, it is equally useful for the forensic toxicologist.

The second section deals with the investigation of the dead and this is an area in which Dr. Curry has decades of experience to share with us. He describes in detail the proper collection of specimens taken at autopsy, the quantity needed, chain of possession, and storage. The extraction and analysis of blood, liver, stomach contents, and other specimens are covered in considerable detail. The analyses of exhumed and decomposed bodies are described, but not in the detail I would have liked. I hope that Dr. Curry will cover this subject more completely in the future editions and will discuss the analysis of embalmed tissues including interpretation of findings.

The final section consists of an extensive alphabetical listing of specific drugs and other toxicants and methods for their analysis. Those which appeared in the third edition have been updated with references as current as 1987. More recent drugs, such as the beta-blockers, have been included in this edition.

This book is written both for the clinical toxicologist and the forensic toxicologist. For both, Dr. Curry has provided a systematic approach to the general unknown. Although some will insist there is no such thing as a general unknown, I disagree. Regardless of the excellence of the investigative staff, there are a number of cases in which autopsy findings are unremarkable and no medical history is available. In those cases the toxicologist will do well to follow Curry's protocol. This book should be readily available to all staff in coroner and medical examiner laboratories.

Dr. Curry dedicated this edition to a founder of the toxicology section of the Academy who was a mentor to many of us, the late Mr. Raymond J. Abernethy.

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