

BOOK REVIEW

Prof. Dr. med. I. Pedal¹

Review of: Maltreatment and Torture. Research in Legal Medicine, Vol. 19

REFERENCE: Oehmichen M (ed.) Maltreatment and Torture. Research in Legal Medicine, vol. 19. Schmidt Romhild, Lubeck, Germany; 1998, 384 pages, \$90.

The spectrum of tasks performed by forensic scientists would be completely misunderstood if limited only to the solving of local forensic problems. The forensic practitioner must also carry out the health political tasks society expects of them and must take a stand on questions of human rights transcending mere local and national interests. The logical consistency of this high claim grows necessarily out of the daily work of the forensic physician. As specialists in the phenomenology of the effects of violence, only the forensic scientist can be expected to perform the detailed documentation and reconstruction of events necessary to prove crimes involving maltreatment and/or torture. It is to the credit of the editor of the present volume that they have help to illuminate this vital connection between the specific competence of forensic scientists and its wider social and political implications.

With this though goes the second aim permeating this volume from the foreword to its last lines: Clarification of the phenomenology of maltreatment and torture confronts us at the same time with the challenge to aid in the prevention at both the local and international levels, a challenge confronting not only the forensic pathologist, but every physician and responsible citizen. To this extent, the present volume speaks not only to the forensic pathologist to all of us.

Complied from talks given at the 6th Lübeck Workshops, the volume is divided into four sections: The first provides a general overview of the topic, including the history of maltreatment and torture, torture perpetrated by the state, victimology, and the possi-

bilities of apprehending those who carry out torture based on the effects left by their violence.

In the second section problems of maltreatment and torture in Germany are examined. Among the topics explored are the use of torture in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) and maltreatment of the aged, of foreigners, of psychiatric patients, of children, the homeless, and the phenomenon of police violence in post-unification Germany.

The third section is devoted to the phenomenology of torture at the physical and mental levels. It offers a detailed description based on empirical evidence and clinical records. The last section examines the role and responsibilities of physicians with regard to the facilitation or prevention of torture, the last chapter being devoted *expressis verbis* to the prevention of torture as demanded by human rights organizations.

The authors of the individual chapter are experts in their fields, some actively involved with ai, the IRCT, the Red Cross, or in institutes of legal medicine. Each chapter is introduced by an abstract in both English and German. Most of the chapters include an extensive list of references and photographs, drawings, graphs, and tables. An extensive index completes the volume.

In sum the present volume represents ground breaking compilation of recent lectures with a perennial problem of national and international importance. It reaches beyond the confines of the merely medical or merely forensic to touch the social conscience of every thinking person. It highlights the absurdity of the disjunction between a state's prosecution of physical and mental abuse when committed by private persons (*viz.*, maltreatment) and the toleration of the same or similar acts (*viz.*, torture) when committed by lackeys of that state.

¹Institut für Rechtsmedizin und Verkehrsmedizin, Heidelberg, Germany.