

BOOK REVIEW

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Review of *Drugs and Death: Profiles of Illegal Drug Abuse*

REFERENCE: Rupp JC. *Drugs and death: profiles of illegal drug abuse*. Deep 6' Productions Inc., Corpus Christi, TX. CD ROM.

While the value and accessibility of a print book will never be completely matched, this volume undoubtedly represents the shape of things to come in educational publishing. This is a CD ROM based, narrated slide show, with text and photographs, regarding the lethal effects of illicit drug groups comprised of inhalants, marijuana, cocaine and amphetamine, LSD and hallucinogens, and heroin. It is not highly technical, and according to the author, is directed towards school students, drug awareness programs, and health care personnel, as well as parents with at risk children who wish to learn more about drug abuse. It is clearly intended to highlight the seamier side of recreational drug use, and the unpleasant and not infrequently lethal consequences. The information is quite graphic, and likely to be upsetting to some, however, the product carries an appropriate warning.

There is no new information in this volume for the forensic toxicologist or pathologist regarding the effects of drugs, their detection, or the changes that they wreak in a person's life. For the forensic community this should be considered a potential educational resource for new investigators or laboratory staff.

The monographs begin with a description of each drug's origins and accessibility, how it is produced, its general effects, and then the variety of means by which people meet their untimely end following its use. This includes both deaths of the accidental overdose variety, as well as traffic deaths, suicides by drugs and other means, and homicides of persons under the influence. It provides for the layperson a comprehensive overview of the involvement of drugs in all types of death, as experienced by Dr. Rupp in his 30 years as a medical examiner in Florida and Texas. The time span

over which the material was accumulated probably presents the greatest limitation of the product in that some of the images are very dated, which significantly lessens their impact.

The software installs easily on either Macintosh or Windows based computers, and runs using Apple Quick Time, which is included on the CD but must be installed on the computer. It is easy to use, opening to a single screen or "home page" from where the viewer selects from the topics listed above, or a biography of the author. Once launched, the slide show is advanced with a single click, or the viewer can jump between slides using a button available for that purpose. The images, and there are generally several on each page, can be enlarged with a single click for more detailed viewing. The narrator reads the script as it appears on the screen, and each slide show is between 20 and 30 slides long.

A little annoying from the perspective of a forensic professional was the fact that the images could not be cut and pasted into one's own presentations e.g., PowerPoint. This includes those images which are in the public domain, taken from government publications, as well as those from Dr. Rupp's own collection. While this is probably done to prevent the image's general broadcast or inappropriate use by the lay viewer, it restricts what could be a useful teaching tool by the pathologist or toxicologist.

The content of each of the sections is generally good and accurate, and sets out in a reasonable, nontechnical nature what each drug is, how it effects the body, and what the consequences, short and long term, of its use are. In keeping with its potential use as a deterrent to drug use, it uses emotion, e.g., the reproduction of several suicide notes, and some gross-out images such as a 22 lb fecal impaction in a heroin user and massive head trauma caused by shotgun suicide in an unhappy drug user, to bring home the tragedy of all deaths associated with recreational drug use.

The digital format is clearly the most novel feature of this product, and its excellent technical execution makes a good case for future production in this medium. The content for the most part accomplishes its stated goal for the nontechnical target audience.

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