

## BOOK REVIEW

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### Review of: *Forensic Gynaecology: Towards Better Care of the Female Victim of Sexual Assault*

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**REFERENCE:** Dalton M, editor. *Forensic gynaecology: Towards better care of female victim of sexual assault*. Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, London, 2004, 270 pp.

Care for the victim of rape requires collaboration among professionals who have different training, professional standards, worldviews, and goals. These partnerships may be conflicted and fragile. The forensic examiner must both care for the victim (here called the “complainant”) and collect and sometimes interpret forensic evidence. This book from the British Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, is directed towards both the expert and novice physician forensic examiner, and uses a multidisciplinary approach to explore a wide range of issues in these cases. Four additional chapters address domestic violence and child sexual abuse.

The book is a compilation of chapters on sexual assault and domestic violence. Contributors are physician specialists in obstetrics and gynecology, pediatrics, urology, and forensic medicine, as well as a barrister, victim advocate, forensic scientist, police superintendent, and medical ethicist. The editor’s stated aim is to present in each chapter the relevant facts, and then address current areas of dilemmas or controversies.

The first chapter, “The Law of Rape,” addresses and summarizes recent changes in British law, including the Sexual Offences Act of 2003. This chapter is lucid and informative. The chapter entitled “Avenues of Presentation” reviews the epidemiology and sociology

of sexual assault, including problematic issues of vulnerability of victims, drug assisted rape, and false allegations. Three chapters detail the composition of the rape evidence kit, methods of evidence collections, and the procedures and interpretation of the medical exam. The chapter entitled “The Doctor in Court” is a concise description of legal procedures, advice to the physician expert on how to testify and includes an expanded discussion of the classic advice “dress up, stand up, speak up, and show up.”

The chapters on domestic violence are more general, and include reviews of prevalence, clinical presentation, and impacts on health. Although doctors are enjoined to screen female patients for domestic violence, they often fail to do so. Instead of reprimands, the author of one chapter proposes an analysis of limitations screening when no clear-cut treatment exists, and discusses in a thoughtful manner the pros and cons of screening and possible interventions. The chapter on child sexual abuse is a too-brief overview, and unfortunately omits discussion of controversies.

The most helpful inclusions in the book are a protocol for managing highly sensitive images in the criminal justice system and sample forms for documenting the sexual assault exam.

More an exploration than a textbook, the styles of chapters range from imperative to discursive. Some chapters are extensively footnoted, but some critical information (e.g., persistence of spermatozoa) lacks reference. This book will be of interest chiefly to generalists and gynecologists in the United Kingdom.

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