

BOOK REVIEW

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Review of: *Forensic Pathology: Principles and Practice*

REFERENCE: Dolinak D, Matshes EW, Lew EO. *Forensic pathology: principles and practice*. Burlington MA: Elsevier Academic Press; 2005, 690 pp.

Most forensic pathologists maintain a library containing some predictable books that serve as reference and provide examples of certain conditions. Pathologists may use these works to support opinions that they render in reports and subsequently in court. I have been honored to review *Forensic Pathology: Principles and Practice*, which I believe will assume its place among those often quoted and respected texts.

Forensic Pathology: Principles and Practice contains 31 chapters and 690 pages. The text is richly supported by color photographs that are nothing short of spectacular. The authors provide useful photomicrographs where applicable, once again of excellent quality. Photographs of X-rays likewise supplement gross findings.

The book begins with an overview of the medicolegal death investigation by a patriarch in our field, Dr. Joe Davis. Drawing upon his years of experience, Dr. Davis provides an overview of the investigation, including the proper scene evaluation through the reasoning necessary to define a cause and manner of death with attendant potential liability of an erroneous interpretation of findings.

The authors dedicate an entire chapter to scene investigation, a sometimes minimized part of the overall scrutiny of a sudden, unexpected death. Multiple exemplar cases emphasize the importance of proper attention to the scene of death as a component of the evidence in ascription of the cause and manner of death. A “take home message” accompanies each case that the authors cite, with “points to consider” with respect to similar cases that the practicing pathologist might encounter.

A lengthy chapter addresses sudden natural deaths. The contributing author addresses this category of deaths by organ system. Although impossible to consider every potential cause of unexpected natural death, this chapter contains the most common that pathologists encounter, and includes some more rare causes, such as Hantavirus infections and polyglandular autoimmune syndromes. The gross photographs in this chapter are excellent and supplemented with equally good quality photomicrographs.

The expected chapters in a forensic pathology textbook are present in this work, such as blunt trauma and sharp force injuries. The authors of the blunt force chapter tackle the issue of the dating of certain injuries in a practical and ethical manner, conceding that forensic pathologists cannot define the exact time that certain

blunt injuries were sustained. Additionally, they include complications that may arise as a result of blunt trauma, and emphasize the importance of recognizing the etiology of these complications to properly render a manner of death. A chapter on firearm injuries provides a good overview of such injuries. The authors of this chapter include a brief discussion of Tasers, a subject of current interest among forensic pathologists and law enforcement. This subject is also a component of a separate chapter dealing with deaths in custody.

The authors have included several chapters dealing with issues not traditionally addressed in such depth in forensic pathology textbooks. For instance, a chapter dedicated to pregnancy speaks to, in depth, deaths that may occur as a complication of pregnancy. The author of this chapter includes discussions of conditions of pregnancy relatively rarely encountered by the practicing forensic pathologist, such as rupture of the liver related to preeclampsia, thrombotic microangiopathy, and the HELLP syndrome, as well as the more commonly observed disorders such as amniotic fluid emboli.

A chapter concerning elder abuse covers, among other things, common forms of physical abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse. An excellent chapter specifically devoted to forensic neuropathology provides an overview of injuries and natural disease affecting the nervous system. Notably, the author includes a good discussion of diffuse traumatic brain injury and examination of neck injuries. Chapters relating to forensic osteology and forensic odontology serve as an overview of these subjects, useful for the practicing forensic pathologist or pathologist in training.

Erroneous attribution of certain artifacts as premortem injuries may lead to unfortunate consequences. Two chapters in *Forensic Pathology: Principles and Practice* emphasize the need to be familiar with such artifacts and recognize them as such. One of these chapters deals with common artifacts arising from resuscitation and medical intervention. The authors give examples of airway injuries associated with intubation, needle punctures with associated hemorrhage, defibrillation, and other resuscitation modalities. Additionally, they describe and provide pictorial examples of conditions that reflect intervention related artifacts such as feeding tubes that become dislodged and pneumothorax associated with central line placement. The second of these chapters covers post-mortem change and artifacts that may occur as a result.

Near the end of the book is a chapter that the authors have entitled “Select Autopsy Topics” wherein they consider issues such as autopsy safety (including a discussion of prion diseases),

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bioterrorism (certainly a timely subject), and how to handle the negative autopsy. The authors additionally discuss techniques that may allow the demonstration of conditions that, if the pathologist does not initially consider, could go unrecognized, such as pneumothorax and air embolus.

Most chapters end with “dos” and “don’ts” with respect to the subject of the chapters. These reminders will be particularly helpful for less experienced pathologists and forensic pathology fellows, although all of us could benefit from the advice.

I have only one criticism of the form of the book, and admittedly, that criticism is based upon a personal preference. The pictures do not contain a caption except for a number. In order for the reader, or

in some cases, the surfer of the pictures, to find the verbal explanation of the picture he/she must locate the corresponding number in the text. However, the numbers in the text are in bold print and in relatively close proximity in most cases to the corresponding images, making the task of minor difficulty.

This text will serve as a reference for the practicing forensic pathologist. Additionally, those embarking upon preparation for the Board examination in forensic pathology will find this text very useful.

Indeed, I, like most forensic pathologists, have predictable books on my shelf. *Forensic Pathology: Principles and Practice* has become one of those books.