

BOOK REVIEW

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Review of: *Cause of Death: Forensic Files of a Medical Examiner*

REFERENCE: Cohle SD, Buhk TT. Cause of death: forensic files of a medical examiner. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007, 338 pp.

Over the last few years, one of the byproducts of the so-called 'CSI Effect' is the abundance of books on forensic science. Some of these books are good and accurate, some are not so good and some are just plain bad. *Cause of Death: Forensic Files of a Medical Examiner* by Stephen D. Cohle, M.D. and Tobin T. Buhk is not one of the bad ones. Rather, it gives an entertaining version of the life and times of a medical examiner.

One commentator, a Medical Examiner himself, calls it "a delightful romp from the death scene, through the autopsy with all the sights and smells, and into the courtroom with its many surprises..." A delightful romp from the death scene may be a little much, but the premise of the book is just.

A forensic pathologist will not learn much from reading this book, but a forensic pathologist is not the intended audience. But even a forensic pathologist might enjoy *Cause of Death* as a quick read to compare cases and see what another forensic pathologist is doing.

The book is primarily intended to give a layman an insider's view of what goes on in the real world of a medical examiner and the impact they have on the lives of others. The reviewer, not being a forensic pathologist, can not comment on whether the science, techniques, explanations, and conclusions are correct. However, this reviewer can assess the book as a layperson who has some knowledge of forensic science. In that regard, the book was a

satisfactory read. Although not taking place in a large city, the book covers a wide variety of cases with many different causes and manners of death.

Despite the fact that some of the phrases and comments are repeated in different chapters, the commentary on life and death and how people act, give much to think about. One of the thought provoking parts is on page 303, when the pathologist/author explains his testimony in a criminal case. "...After countless court appearances, I realize that the fate of the case lies in the minds of twelve people whose knowledge of forensic science may extend only as far as the last episode of "CSI" or "Law & Order" they viewed, so I explain in "layperson's language" the job and its jurisdiction."

While the reviewer enjoyed reading this book, there are some problems. There are 16 pages of high quality color photographs, which could have been better used. They could have been numbered and referred to in the text for better explanations of discussed material. Some of the photos refer to chapters but only in a general way. It was also frustrating as to how the chapters were numbered. For reference purposes, the numbering system was less than perfect. At the end of the book there is a section for footnotes and sources. Much of the information is duplicated in each portion. This should have been combined and refined into one source.

These flaws aside, the book is recommended for anyone who wants an intriguing read about what is going on in the professional life of a medical examiner. Most of all, violence aside, *Cause of Death* is an eye-opener on how we should take better care of our bodies.

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