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Review of: *Death Investigation: Systems and Procedures*

REFERENCE: Hanzlick R. Death investigation: systems and procedures. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2007, 169 pp.

Dr. Hanzlick has written a brief guide to the way in which death investigation proceeds in the United States, as governed by the laws of the states and jurisdictions that form the United States. In the Preface, Dr. Hanzlick states that his purpose in writing *Death Investigation: Systems and Procedures* is to provide a single convenient resource for students, the public, and practicing death professionals on the various ways that death investigation is conducted in this country. The book does not discuss how to investigate a death, but rather how deaths as a whole are investigated according to the differing laws that create and empower different death investigation systems. Such death investigation systems include hospitals, where deaths that do not fall under the jurisdiction of a forensic office are investigated by a hospital autopsy. Dr. Hanzlick writes in simple language that is easily understandable to a member of the lay public.

Dr. Hanzlick begins with general aspects of death investigation, describing the components of a death investigation (scene examination, autopsy, report preparation). He then distinguishes the types of death investigation (medicolegal, hospital-based, or private “for hire” investigations), including the ways in which the goals of each of these types differ. Pathology and pathologists are described (it takes longer than you might think), as are the settings for autopsy and the means by which autopsy work is funded (whether directly or indirectly by the government). Dr. Hanzlick succinctly describes the difference between coroner and medical examiner systems. Chapters address the types of deaths reportable to a medicolegal death investigation office, with mention of special circumstances such as mass fatalities or deaths on Indian reservations. The last

part of the book addresses topics such as the order of kinship for granting permission for autopsy, death certificates, exhumations, funeral arrangements and death investigation, basic principles of qualifying as an expert witness, and life insurance. Dr. Hanzlick discusses what to do if you as a relative disagree with the conclusions of the death investigation. The penultimate chapter is a sample autopsy report. The final chapter is especially compelling; Dr. Hanzlick simply tells what happened one day at a medical examiner office. The quotidian nature of this final chapter has a poignance that anyone practicing death investigation day after day would recognize immediately. I am glad that Dr. Hanzlick included this view of our work.

Death Investigation: Systems and Procedures is appropriate for anyone who does not already practice in a death investigation system. Those who have practiced as a death investigator of any sort for more than a year will have absorbed the knowledge within the book as a matter of course in doing their job. If, on the other hand, the reader does not practice death investigation, then Dr. Hanzlick has dispelled some of the mystery that surrounds our profession. Moreover, the book is filled with practical advice that could help someone unaccustomed to interacting with a death investigation office. For example, Dr. Hanzlick recommends that anyone contemplating an exhumation first talk with an expert in autopsy and exhumation, because such an expert can give a good idea of the likelihood that an exhumation will be able to answer the unanswered questions. Attorneys may find this book useful in their dealings with family who seek legal counsel concerning a death, especially when the family is at odds with the death investigation system involved in the case. For such laymen, especially, Dr. Hanzlick has admirably achieved his stated aim.

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