

BOOK REVIEW

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Review of: *Forensic Neuropathology: A Practical Review of the Fundamentals*

REFERENCE: Itabashi HH, Andrews J, Tomiyasu U, Erlich S, Sathyavagiswaran L. *Forensic neuropathology: a practical review of the fundamentals*, 1st edn. Academic Press, 2007, 450 pp.

Forensic Neuropathology: A Practical Review of the Fundamentals is one of those books that not only delivers on what it promises in its title, but provides much, much more. It truly is a compendium of the breadth and depth of information in the field.

Chapters 1 and 3 deal with the idiosyncrasies of the gross and microscopic examination of the brain, and are worth the price of the book alone. Their description of the red neuron and whether its presence defines hypoxic-ischemic injury is wonderful. Their summary of linear skull fractures and correlation with radiology is something I have not seen elsewhere. The chapters dedicated to trauma offer information in a single place that would be time-consuming to find elsewhere. They discuss issues such as systemic and other organ consequences of head injury, items that are not often considered together in deaths due primarily to head injury.

The sections on more traditional (and esoteric) neuropathologic fare are detailed compendiums of current information. Everything you might need regarding sudden unexpected death and the brain, vascular disease of the CNS, neurodegenerative disorders, vascular disease, infections, tumors and demyelinating disorders in the forensic setting, is here. There is an interesting chapter on periprocedural complications that includes rare items such as injury due to neck manipulation and their bibliography, and a chapter on miscellaneous topics that has a valuable discussion on the discrepancies between pathologic and radiologic findings, and CNS complications of systemic disease.

There are some omissions that are maddening when you consider the depth of other chapters. For example, the authors go into a detailed analysis of the currently available sources for brain weights and dimensions and in a section titled "Comments on Brain Weight Tables" they describe what they currently use but

don't include them in the appendix, or anywhere else. They do cite the primary sources, but the idea behind a book like this is to include that type of information.

The chapter on the suspected case of child abuse is interesting. The authors have bent over backwards in this chapter to avoid taking sides in the controversy with SBS and whether or not it exists. They do provide an extensive list of resources, including a thorough listing of the bibliography on abusive head trauma. They even provide a series of questions that may arise in an individual child abuse case which is useful but I find this chapter a disappointment because they could have answered some of those questions with the same in-depth analysis they used in other chapters of the book. You can almost feel the anxiety (such as may be conveyed in a book about neuropathology) about avoiding the appearance of taking sides. However, it is hard to quibble with the general idea that each case of abusive head trauma has its own contextual difficulties that require deliberation that might not be needed in other kinds of head trauma.

There are some oddities in the text. For example, in the chapter on gunshot wounds, there is a curious digression on reaction times and whether or not a person shot when facing the shooter can end up with a gunshot wound to the back if his body is turning fast enough. It sounds more like a sidebar that one of the authors is interested in and I have not seen anything like this in other textbooks.

Finally, the book is touted as a reference for anyone, including law enforcement and attorneys. I think this is a stretch. There are many sections that are hard to read even if you are a pathologist because neuropathology simply does not lend itself to page-turning reading and is impossible to understand if you do not have a background in the argot of pathology.

In summary, this is currently the most comprehensive forensic neuropathology reference in publication, and, despite some flaws, will be the standard against which others will be compared for years to come.

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