

**BOOK REVIEW**

*J. Keith Pinckard*,<sup>1,2</sup> M.D., Ph.D.

## Review of: *Forensic Pathology for Police, Death Investigators, Attorneys, and Forensic Scientists*

**REFERENCE:** Prahlow J. *Forensic pathology for police, death investigators, attorneys, and forensic scientists*. New York, NY: Springer Science+Business Media, LLC, 2010, 632 pp.

The title of this book is accurate; its purpose is clearly to provide a background in forensic pathology to the nonphysician professionals who interact with forensic pathologists. The author also states that a secondary purpose of the book is to help to dispel inaccurate or fallacious portrayals of forensic pathology and its limitations that are perpetuated by the popular and entertainment media. This focus is particularly important because an accurate understanding of the basics of forensic pathology by these other professionals may eventually “trickle down” and educate the general public and consequently jury members. This book has not only achieved, but surpassed these goals.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I is Introductory Topics, whose chapters include Introduction to Pathology, Introduction to Forensic Sciences, Introduction to Forensic Pathology, Death Investigation, Death Certification, and Overview of Anatomy and Physiology. Some of these introductory topics are not normally covered in forensic pathology textbooks, but for the intended audience, this was appropriate and will be of benefit to the nonphysician reader. Part II is General Topics in Forensic Pathology and includes chapters on The Postmortem Forensic Examination/Autopsy, Postmortem Changes and Time of Death, and Identification of Human Remains. Part III is Major Causes/Mechanisms of Death and includes chapters on Natural Deaths, Drug-Related and Toxin-Related Deaths, Blunt Force Injury Deaths, Gunshot Wound Deaths, Sharp Force Injury Deaths, Asphyxial Deaths, Drowning, Electrical Deaths, Temperature-Related Deaths, Burns and Fire-Related Deaths, Deaths in Infancy and Childhood, and Miscellaneous Topics. Following Part III are appendices including Additional Resources and Reference Books.

Taking into account the intended audience, the chapters are well-written and up-to-date. There is a sufficient amount of detail for the targeted audience, and in fact, some of the chapters provide information above and beyond what is necessary. This would also

make the book useful for medical students, pathology residents, and fellows. Some of the chapters are easily on par in both scope and quality with their counterparts in textbooks intended for forensic pathologists. Although generally not cited individually within the text, selected references for further reading are listed at the end of each chapter and are sometimes organized by topic. The index at the back of the book is quite detailed.

The only significant problem with this book revolves around several issues with the photographs. In the Foreword, Prahlow states, “I am a firm believer that providing more photographs is better than providing fewer photographs” (p. vii), and he has included nearly 500 of them in the text. The problem is that they are all black and white and are for the most part poorly reproduced on paper that appears to be of inferior quality. This is especially disappointing given the book’s relatively high price point. However, the color versions of these photos, as well as more than 600 additional color photographs/photomicrographs that were referenced (but not included) in the book chapters are included on an accompanying CD-ROM disk. Unfortunately, there are problems with the disk itself: apparently, several photographs were omitted, and there is a loose-leaf erratum inside the book’s cover, which prompts the reader to access a website where the photos may be downloaded. The files are downloaded in a compressed format and must be extracted (“unzipped”) after the download. Given that these images are electronic, they could have been reproduced larger than the size at which they would have been printed, but this is not the case. In fact, approximately half of the images are less than 50 KB, resulting in images that are remarkably small (some are the size of a postage stamp). Additionally, the digital photomicrographs are inconsistent in image quality and color reproduction.

In summary, *Forensic Pathology for Police, Death Investigators, Attorneys, and Forensic Scientists* lives up to its title. It will provide those nonphysician forensic professionals with a basic background of forensic pathology, which will enable them to effectively understand and communicate with forensic pathologists. However, forensic pathology is a visual profession, and it is disappointing that this well-written text is paired with significant problems with the photographs, especially given its high price.

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor of Pathology, University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, 5230 Southwestern Medical Ave., Dallas, TX 75235.

<sup>2</sup>Medical Examiner, Southwestern Institute of Forensic Sciences, 5230 Southwestern Medical Ave., Dallas, TX 75235.