

## BOOK REVIEW

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### Review of: *Current Practice in Forensic Medicine*

**REFERENCE:** Gall J, Payne-James J, editors. *Current practice in forensic medicine*. Chichester, UK: John Wiley and Sons, Ltd, 2011, 327 pp.

*Current Practice in Forensic Medicine*, edited by John Gall and Jason Payne-James, is touted in the Preface as a “forerunner to a regular, multivolume text addressing recent advances in the practice of forensic medicine” (p. xix). Through the contributions of many authors, this volume, consisting of 12 chapters, strives to keep the forensic medicine community current on select topics. While some of the topics are presented with a focus on examination of the living, the information can generally be extrapolated to postmortem examination. A brief review of the chapters demonstrates the diversity of the topics covered.

Chapter 1 (“Expert Evidence and Healthcare Professionals”) provides a basic overview of the legal system while defining the roles of the professionals involved. Simple tips are suggested for assisting in effective testimony, and several landmark court rulings are summarized. Chapter 2 (“Forensic Investigation of Biological Weapon Use”) addresses the potential for biological weapon use in a society where other means of implementing mass casualty have emerged, with an emphasis on the difficulty of detecting such attacks without an astute clinical suspicion. An Appendix with brief descriptions for some of the more likely biological agents is included at the end of the chapter.

Chapters 3 (“The Paediatric Hymen”), 4 (“Assessment and Interpretation of Bone Trauma in Children”), and 5 (“Adult Sexual Assault”) provide research-based guidance and suggestions for examiners facing the daunting task of interpreting findings in suspected child abuse and adult sexual assault cases while emphasizing the importance of performing an examination within a timely manner after presentation. Studies cited provide compelling statistical evidence to assist in discriminating normal tissue variants from true injury, which may be particularly difficult in the evaluation of the pediatric hymen. An overview of basic pediatric radiographic techniques is presented with discussion of reasons for false-negative and false-positive results and discussion of the limitations of a given radiologic modality.

A basis for the ethical, legal, and moral decision to photograph genital injuries is debated in Chapter 6 (“The Ethical and Medical

Aspects of Photodocumenting Genital Injury”), with emphasis centered on the distress that living patients will endure in order to achieve sound documentation. Chapters 7 (“The Photography of Injuries”) and 8 (“DNA Analysis: Current Practice and Problems”) detail the technical aspects of forensic photography and DNA analysis, with examples of the inherent potential problems and limitations of various methods. Although the writing in the latter two chapters becomes quite technical, informative images and figures facilitate comprehension for the novice looking to learn about the fields of photography and DNA analysis.

Chapters 9 (“Injury Interpretation: Possible Errors and Fallacies”) and 10 (“Self-Inflicted Injuries and Associated Psychological Profiles”) both highlight the need for forensic practitioners to acknowledge their limitations, specifically with regard to injury interpretation. The authors lament the dearth of quality research available to assist in injury interpretation and understand the epidemiology of self-harm. The current state of forensic bite mark interpretation and tips for improved evidence documentation are provided in Chapter 11 (“Bite Marks”), and a topical overview of the investigation into aviation deaths is presented in Chapter 12 (“Aviation Disasters: The Role of the Forensic Pathologist”).

The intended audience of this text is diverse, with chapters that will appeal to the forensic pathologist, forensic photographer, criminal scientist, forensic psychiatrist, and forensic odontologist; however, some of the topics will certainly hold more relevance for those who perform forensic examinations on the living. The information is current, including discussion of many studies published within the 2 years prior to the book’s publication. The text also provides insight into the differences in the practice of forensic medicine internationally, as the authors offer an eclectic view of world practice and support their writings with studies from numerous countries. Although this book is not likely to be a daily reference for those whose practice is limited to postmortem examination, it remains an informative and interesting read. With few typographical errors and well-designed chapter formats, the text is easy to navigate and comprehend. The editors and authors have accomplished their goal of presenting the current state of select forensic medicine topics with discussion of recent publications that impact the knowledge base, thus providing a current reference for the clinical forensic medicine practitioner.

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