

Author's Response

Sir,

We thank very much John D. DeHaan for his comments.

First of all, the article has been written essentially to rule out any myth about these cases. We accept that the term "spontaneous combustion" is misleading, but we have used the term "so-called spontaneous combustion" to indicate that spontaneous combustion of a body does not exist. It is clearly written within the article, as soon as the first sentence: "*So-called Spontaneous Human Combustion is not spontaneous, but needs a source of heat near the body.*" I think that we cannot be clearer about the myth of spontaneous combustion. And we claim that this sustained combustion of the body (from an external source of heat) with the very specific features we have described do exist in the forensic practice. We do not sustain the myth, we explain that such forensic cases exist and are linked to an external source of heat.

John DeHann supports the "candle theory" with the fat as fuel, and cloth, blanket, or carpet (as examples) as wicks. The combustion ends when the wick or the fat fade, explaining that some parts of the body may be well preserved. The precision of the difference between porous fabrics (like cotton) versus synthetic fabrics (that will melt) is very interesting to explain the phenomenon. DeHann indicates that such a fire needs only a modest air supply and that the size of the fire is very small. All these statements are in agreement with what we have written in our paper and explain

why the fire may be undetected. The other explanation of such an undetected fire is the frequency of socially isolated victims, who may live in remote areas.

DeHann concludes that "to quote '*historical cases and those in fictional novels is a serious scientific error.*'" I do not agree with that point of view, because understanding the evolution of the scientific ideas is crucial in forensic pathology. And again we have not supported the myth of spontaneous combustion in this article, but on the contrary supported the opposite point of view. And to be very clear with our meaning, it was written as the first sentence of the article ("*So-called Spontaneous Human Combustion is not spontaneous, but needs a source of heat near the body.*") and in the conclusion as well: "*In conclusion, so-called spontaneous human combustion is a reality in forensic practice, but burning of the body is not spontaneous. To avoid any ambiguity, another name could be suggested for these cases, as 'isolated body combustion' or 'isolated central body combustion.'*" (DeHaan proposes "sustained combustion," but the term "isolated" indicates that the environment is nearly intact).

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