ANIL AGGRAWAL'S
Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology
The world's first online journal devoted entirely to forensic medicine and toxicology · Published 1 January and 1 July

VOL. 3, NO. 2
Downloaded from www.anilaggrawal.com · ISSN 0972-8074 (Online) · https://www.anilaggrawal.com/ij/vol_003_no_002/others/interview/stark.html

Interview with Margaret M. Stark

(*Dr Margaret M Stark LLM DGM DMJ(Clin) DAB is one of the foremost experts in Clinical Forensic Medicine. She has been a registered medical practitioner since 1981and has worked in the field of clinical forensic medicine since 1989. Previously she had a number of hospital posts including accident and emergency medicine and general medicine and trained as a general practitioner. She has worked as a Forensic Medical Examiner (FME) with the Metropolitan Police in South London since 1989 and is now Principal FME and an Area Medical Adviser to the Commissioner of the Metropolis.*

Dr Margaret M Stark



She holds the post of Honorary Senior Lecturer in the Forensic Medicine Unit at St. George's Hospital Medical School. This year (2002) she became the President of the Association of Police Surgeons (APS)

(www.apsweb.org.uk) and was the Chairman of the Education and Research Committee of the APS from 1995-2000. She is a member of the Editorial Board of the Journal of Clinical Forensic Medicine and an examiner for the Diploma in Medical Jurisprudence (Clinical) and the Diploma in Forensic Medical Sciences.

Her principal forensic interest is the management of substance misuse especially relating to those detained in police custody. She studied for the Diploma of Addictive Behaviour in the Centre for Addiction Studies at St. George's Hospital Medical School passing with distinction and her dissertation for the Masters degree in law was entitled "The Legal and Ethical Aspects of the Management of Drug Addicts in Police Custody".

She has edited a textbook "A Physician's Guide to Clinical Forensic Medicine" (2000) in which she co-authored two chapters ("Substance Misuse" and "Care of Detainees and has recently (November 2001) co-edited "Good Practice Guidelines for Forensic Medical Examiners MPS. Her textbook was reviewed in the current issue of this journal by two experts from different continents - Gyan Fernando from the UK, and Bryan Chrz from USA.

We at the "Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology" approached her for an online interview and she graciously agreed. The interview was conducted for well over two months. Some excerpts.. ..)

Qu. 1. How did you become interested in forensic medicine? Very few ladies do that? Did you want to become one, right from your childhood?

Ans. I became interested through a friend in general practice - she had started doing the work and said it was fun and why didn't I sign up and try it and the rest is history as they say! I am not a pathologist though. I work with the living and only occasionally go to sudden/suspicious deaths.

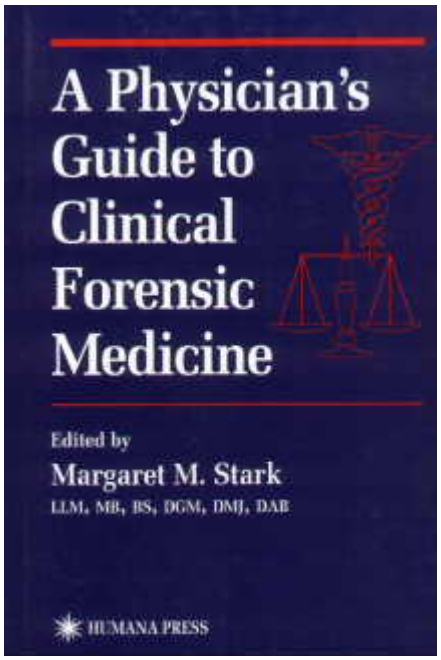
Qu. 2. Is this your first book? Which books have you written before? On which subjects?

Ans. No. I co-wrote a little book "Symptoms and Signs of Substance Misuse" with Jason Payne-James.

Qu. 3. What is your next book about? Is it also on Clinical forensic medicine?

Ans. Who knows as yet! Writing/editing books is hard work!

The book "A Physician's Guide to Clinical Forensic Medicine" by Margaret Stark, published by Humana Press. Click on the book to go to its review.



Qu. 4. Could you tell us about your family? Did you inherit the love of writing from your parents?

Ans. My parents passed away when I was in my twenties. But as far as I know no one in the family wrote. I guess I started from necessity - the need to publish papers - and the book was commissioned after Steven Karch, the series editor, saw some work I had done for the Department of Health in the UK on Guidelines for Substance Misuse Detainees in Police Custody.

I have no brothers or sisters or any close family left except my daughter Amelia. I do have some very special friends who have been a great support to me in recent years.

Qu. 5. What do you love most?

Ans. What or Who? Who - My daughter Amelia and then my four cats - Smokey, Patch, Rusty and Olivette.

What - I would have to say "my work" - I really do enjoy it!!

Qu. 6. Your favorite dish, book, movie, star, person?

Ans. I love food and from one day to the next it varies - Indian, Italian, French etc etc. I rarely go to the movies but for sheer escapism I loved the Lethal Weapon films! I read all the crime thrillers trying to spot the mistakes!

Qu. 7. What do you dislike most?

Ans. Disorganisation!

Qu. 8. What do you consider as your biggest achievement in life? Your biggest/strangest/most baffling case? Would you like to share experiences of this case with our readers?

Ans. Apart from being a single mother which is a constant struggle - editing the textbook was a huge achievement - *A Physician's Guide to Clinical Forensic Medicine* - and becoming President of the APS. I am only the second lady to hold the office and the previous Lady President Molly Cosgrove was in 1972.

Qu. 9. If you were able to choose your profession again, what would it be, and why?

Ans. Medicine - despite everything I always wanted to be a doctor and I would do it again but I would go into forensic medicine earlier having done a bit of psychiatry.



"If I were to choose my profession again, I would again choose Medicine. Despite everything I always wanted to be a doctor and I would do it again but I would go into forensic medicine earlier having done a bit of psychiatry. ...."

Qu. 10. Have you ever traveled to India, or to Indian subcontinent? Would you like to visit, if such an opportunity arose?

Ans. Never traveled there and would love to! I really enjoy travelling but haven't been able to do so much since I had Amelia. I recently missed two trips to the IAFS meeting in France and an invited lecture in Japan because I broke my ankle as I tripped down the penultimate stair at home at the end of July!

Qu. 11. What do you do in your spare time? Your hobbies, interests?

Ans. I love to cook, go to the theatre, travel, keep fit, read something other than medical journals!

Qu. 12. Any interesting court experience/police experience?

Ans. Not long after I started I saw a young girl who had concealed the birth of her baby. But it all turned out happily.

Qu. 13. Has any criminal ever tried to intimidate you?

Ans. Not too often.

Qu. 14. If a youngster of about 12-13 years wanted to become a forensic expert, how should he proceed?

Ans. Depending on their skills training in medicine to become a doctor and then train in clinical areas psychiatry, clinical forensic medicine or pathology. If they are more scientifically bent then a science degree in the area botany, biochemistry etc

Qu. 15. How many children do you have? Would you be happy if they took up the profession of Forensic Medicine? What are they doing now anyway?

Ans. One child Amelia - aged 21 months - she really concentrating on how to talk at the moment but if she did medicine I would be very proud!

Margaret Stark can be approached via E-mail at stark@cheam.demon.co.uk. The review of her book A Physician's Guide to Clinical Forensic Medicine *appears in this issue of this journal. Readers wanting to visit this review may want to the linked page (page010).*

Interview appearing in the previous issue Interview appearing in the next issue Interviews : Collective Index Interview with Anoop Chandola, in *Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Book Reviews (sister publication)* (Volume 1, Number 2, July - December 2002)

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