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. 4, NO. 2
Downloaded from www.anilaggrawal.com · ISSN 0972-8074 (Online) · https://www.anilaggrawal.com/ij/vol_004_no_002/others/editorial.html;

Editorial

CITE THIS ARTICLE

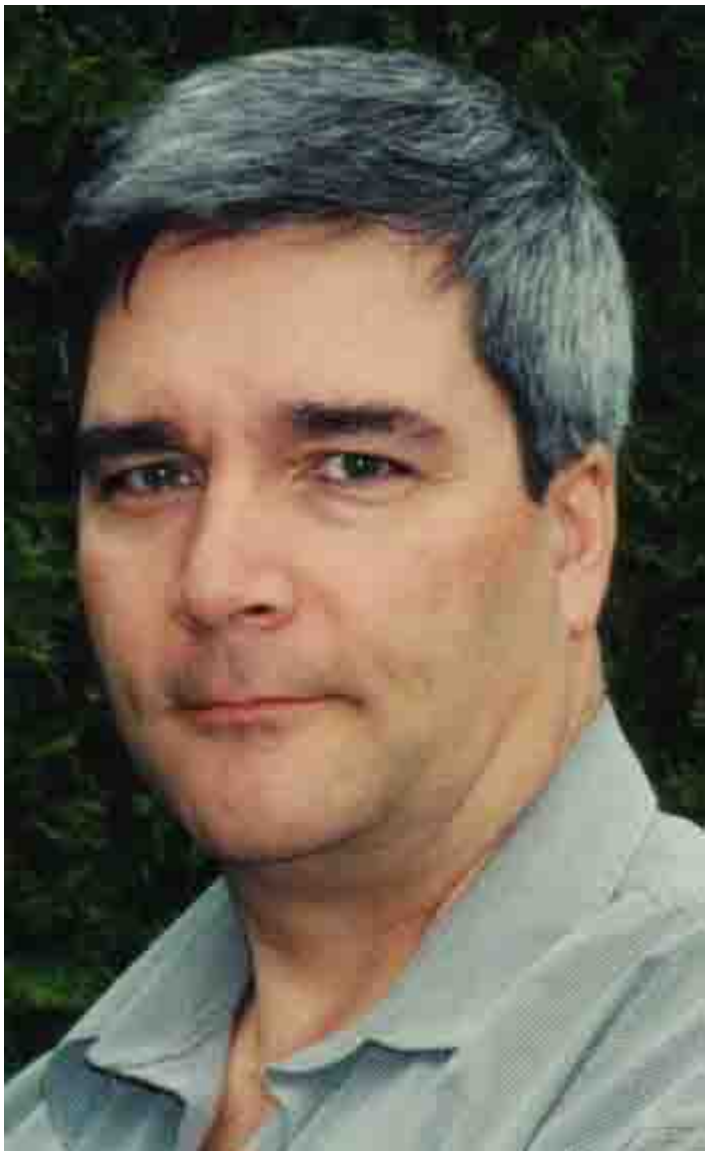
Munroe R. Passing The Torch (Editorial). *Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology* [serial on the Internet]. 2003; Vol. 4, No. 2 (July - December 2003): [about 6 p]. Available from: https://www.anilaggrawal.com/ij/vol_004_no_002/others/editorial.html; Published July 1, 2003,

: EMBASE Accession Number: 2004204906

Passing The Torch

-Richard Munroe
1408 Madrona Place
Coquitlam , British Columbia
Canada
V3E 2S5
Email: rmunroe@TripleI.ca

Richard Munroe



Forensic science is an enigma to many. The concepts involved and the level of scientific and legal scrutiny can be very intimidating. Many pathologists shy from the spotlight of a known capital case due to the media and legal concerns. However, it is interesting to note that a former Chief Medical Examiner used to counsel his pathologists that all autopsies are in fact potentially criminal forensic cases. It is up to the pathologist to be acutely aware of any potential evidence that may be available from the deceased. Conversely, the police must be in a position to supply any and all answers posed by the pathologist, during the autopsy, with respect to the circumstances of the death.

This places the police and medical teams inexorably inter-twinned in the prosecution of any capital case. The concept of passing the torch is an accurate reference to the circumstances of the transfer of the deceased from police to medical custody. There must be a full disclosure of pertinent details known by the police agency to the pathologist to ensure evidence continuity. This is a key element in the investigative process, which requires a high level of trust and uniform protocol.

Depending on the religious circumstances of the victim, burial time frames are extremely important to the family. In a multi ethnic society, this can lead to intermittent conflicts. Where the death occurs in a primarily uni-ethnic society, certain standard operating procedures can be established. Religious concerns may also hinder the ability to even perform an autopsy.

Having a proper autopsy is critical in establishing the public's trust in the entire process. When aspects of the incident are withheld from the public for investigative reasons, the public relies on a silent trust that the authorities are acting in a prudent and just manner to ensure the case is tried fairly. Having a medical doctor involved in the autopsy portion of the case also instills a measure of trust in the system. Doctors and nurses around the world are generally known and trusted as the persons that the people can always trust. The very concept and format of medical practice is to help and heal. Part of that healing comes to the family as well, when they can trust the process that deals with the prosecution of a family member's suspicious or criminal death.

As a result of this faith bond between the doctors and the public, the police agencies also borrow a measure of that trust when they are working in full concert with the medical staff. This situation would be further augmented by the development of forensic nursing protocols within the hospital structure. This complete process can be very comforting for a population, especially in regions where the police are not viewed in the highest esteem. Policing is by its very nature in direct conflict with certain segments of the population. Police agencies are designed to protect society from the criminal element within, but these powers of arrest and detention are generally only bestowed by the will and sanction of the people they are sworn to protect.

...As a result of this faith bond between the doctors and the public, the police agencies also borrow a measure of that trust when they are working in full concert with the medical staff. This situation would be further augmented by the development of forensic nursing protocols within the hospital structure. This complete process can be very comforting for a population...

In regions with a military or dictatorial police presence, the relationship is more strained and the level of trust may not exist. This is entirely dependent on the prevailing police methods and role of the government in the daily affairs of the people. There is an old saying that" power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely". The public's concerns, privacy and liberty are always a concern in western based policing formats. The London Constabulary in England and portions of Canadian law enforcement do not even carry firearms. This is due to many decades of trust installed in the public that the police are there to protect them and that the police are in turn protected by the trust and will of the people. Bringing harm to a police officer in most jurisdictions leads to the highest penalties that can be brought by the country under the law.

This trust allows the police to provide testimony in court that is considered by the courts to be honest and without malice. As a result a police officer's word is held in a higher regard than others in the population. When an officer fails in his or her task to maintain that level of personal credibility, the results are swift, sure and permanent. As a result of this perception the public has a high degree of trust in the legal process, especially when coupled with the testimony of a medical doctor.

In jurisdictions where that procedural trust is not instilled in the public's minds, efforts must be taken to build that trust. Where a concerted effort to show the public that the investigational process which includes the autopsy portion of the case, is done in a fair honest and open manner, they will gain a level of comfort. Comfort with the legal process is a cornerstone in developing a safe and secure society. When the police pass the torch of trust to the medical profession and it is passed back with an un-diminished flame, society can rest more comfortably.

Editorial appearing in the Previous Issue

Editorials - Cumulative Index

Request a PDF file of this editorial by clicking here. (If your screen resolution can not be increased, or if printing this page is giving you problems like overlapping of graphics and/or tables etc, you can take a proper printout from a pdf file. You will need an Acrobat Reader though.)