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Book Reviews: Technical Books Section



COMPREHENSIVE AND AUTHORITATIVE

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[Excerpts from this encyclopedia]

Rating : 10
★★★★★★★★★★ (10/5)

Encyclopedia of Forensic and Legal Medicine (4 volumes), edited by Jason Payne-James, Roger Byard, Tracey Corey and Carol Henderson, Hard bound, 8.5" x 11"
Elsevier Academic Press, The Boulevard, Langford Lane, Kidlington, Oxford, OX5 1GB, UK, 2084 pages, illus., bibliog., Author and Subject index.
ISBN 0-12-547970-0. Library of Congress Control Number: 2004113925. Publication date: June 8, 2005.

Volume 1 - From "Accreditation" till "Courts, Report writing" - (xxxix + 495 pages)

Volume 2 – From "Crime-Scene Investigation and Examination" till "Human Rights – Controls and Principles" - (xxxix + 546 pages)

Volume 3 – From "Identification" till "Ritualistic Crime" – (xxxix + 564 pages)

Volume 4 – From "Road Traffic Accidents, Airbag related injuries and deaths" till "Yakuza" plus author index (2 pages) plus subject index (87 pages) – (xxxix + 479 pages)

List of editors and editorial advisory board, two forewords (one by Bernard Knight giving a forensic perspective and another by Dame Elizabeth Butler-Sloss giving a legal perspective), preface, introduction, Guide to use of the encyclopedia, list of contributors and contents (of all four volumes) appear in each volume.

Price: $1095, £695.00, €995 [Introductory prices (till September 30th, 2005) - $740.00, £465.00, ¥105,039]

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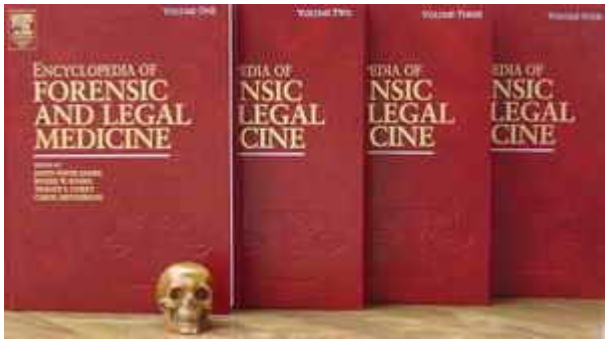


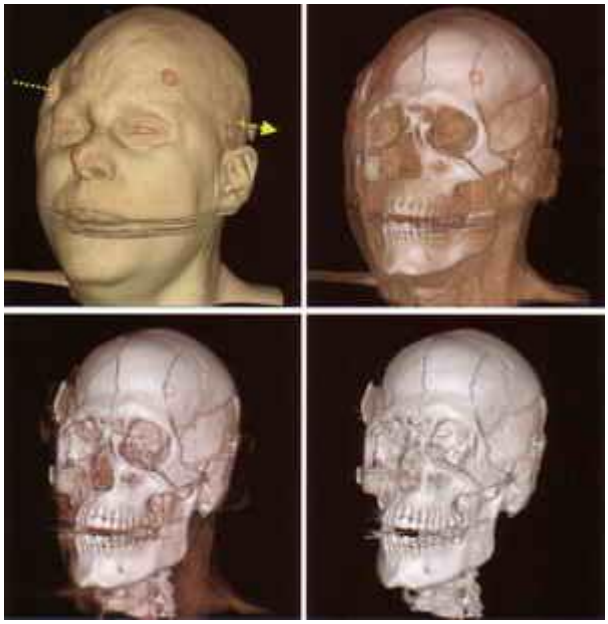
One editor-in-chief, three editors, 25 editorial board members, 279 contributors, and four years of hard work with a leading publisher of medical titles! That's the recipe. And what do you get? A total of 293 entries, each averaging about 4000 words spread over 2100 pages in four authoritative, pristine, immaculate volumes.

Am I "day dreaming" about an ultimate encyclopedia of forensic medicine?

No, it's all real!

Welcome to one of the most authoritative works on Forensic and Legal medicine, published in recent times. Written by 279 contributors from 21 countries, it is the ultimate reference source for every imaginable query related to forensic medicine. When I was studying for my M.D. in Forensic Medicine, way back in 1979, the only encyclopedia available was "Forensic Medicine – A Study in Trauma and Environmental Hazards". Published in 1977 by W.B. Saunders (which has merged with Elsevier now), this was a 3-volume encyclopedia edited by Cesare G. Tedeschi, William G. Eckert and Luke G. Tedeschi. It spanned a total of 1680 pages.

This encyclopedia is full of color pictures such as this. This one (excerpted from vol 3, page 60) shows the three dimensional CT reconstruction (VR and SSD) showing skin defect and fracture system.



Though this encyclopedia admirably served the needs of the forensic community for several years, it is now hopelessly out of date, and for several years, all of us were pining for a fresh encyclopedia

incorporating all new developments occurring during the last quarter century. Completely new techniques such as DNA profiling were discovered during this period. Computers and internet made their appearance during the late eighties and early nineties, giving rise to entirely new crimes, in turn causing the emergence of new fields of forensic investigation such as cyber forensics. Emergence of new drugs led to hitherto unknown crimes such as drug facilitated sexual assault. Physicians found themselves facing new charges of drug-induced injuries. Definitions of death changed from the traditional tripod of life to the newer concept of brain stem death. Daubert decision came in 1993, setting new standards for admissibility of scientific evidence. Terrorism made its appearance in early nineties, reaching its pinnacle in 2001 with the crashing of jetliners in the World Trade Center, USA and more recently the bombing of the UK underground. All these topics needed to be dealt with in a fresh and completely new encyclopedia.

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Fortunately Elsevier, the leading publisher of medical books, realized this need and assembled a "dream team" comprising of Jason Payne-James, Roger Byard, Tracey Corey and Carol Henderson, who between them have over 1500 published papers and over 15 books. Assisted by 25 members of the editorial advisory board, picked up from 11 different countries, the editors worked tirelessly for 4 years – commissioning, writing, editing, checking and cross-checking each and every single fact. The result is this immaculate encyclopedia. Interestingly Bernard Knight, who wrote 5 chapters in the earlier encyclopedia, has written a foreword to this one. Quite rightly he mentions, "Some of the headings in the list of contents would seem unfamiliar to doctors of previous generations – examples might be "accreditation, digital evidence, crime-scene management, profiling, ritualistic crime, terrorism and torture" – but this underlines the evolutionary nature of all medical disciplines, in which legal medicine is no exception."

Quick Facts



& Brings together all appropriate aspects of forensic medicine and legal medicine.
& Written, edited, checked and cross-checked by one editor-in-chief, three editors and 25 editorial board members.
& 293 entries contributed by a total of 279 contributors from 21 countries spanning five continents.
& Each entry averages about 4000 words, supplemented by full color photographs, diagrams and tables.
& Contains sample forms and other materials that the readers can adapt for their own practice.
& Provides a reliable starting point for validated information across all fields related to forensic and legal medicine.
& Multidisciplinary, multi-jurisdictional and global emphasis.

Forensic and legal medicine has traditionally been defined as the use of medical knowledge for assisting law and administration of justice. However this encyclopedia has boldly gone ahead and

touched topics which many of us would classically include in criminology, law, forensic science or even sociology. This is an excellent feature, as it is not always possible to divorce forensic medicine from these allied specialties. Topics such as criminal profiling, fire investigation, forensic botany, professional bodies, preparation of witnesses, pattern evidence, religious attitudes to death, recovered memory, religious exception defense, tactical medicine, and victim support fall in these categories.

One aspect that becomes apparent as soon as you start leafing through this encyclopedia, is its global appeal. Take for instance the chapter on “Crime scene management systems”. Described in volume 2, this topic has three entries, (i) Continental Europe, discussed by two experts from France (ii) United Kingdom, discussed by two experts from the UK and (iii) USA, discussed by an expert from the USA. Topics like Custody death, Death investigation systems, and Court systems have similarly been dealt from a global perspective. For some entries of this nature the editors have even commissioned two authors from different countries, allowing for a better assimilation. A good example is the entry entitled “Death Investigation systems/Nordic countries” which is co-authored by three experts - two from Sweden and one from Norway.

Most entries in the encyclopedia are accompanied by full color photographs of high quality. The index comprises of a total of 87 pages – a mini booklet in itself. Aided by a contents list, and extensive cross-references, this index serves as a very powerful tool to help readers to find their way through this encyclopedia. The cross-references appear at the end of each chapter, and if you followed the cross-references religiously, no matter where you begin, you will end up reading the whole encyclopedia.

…How would I rate this encyclopedia? In two words – excellent and indispensable! This encyclopedia is virtually a goldmine of information. It landed on my study table three weeks back, and I have since been poring through it for several hours everyday; I am not through with it yet. Amazingly I keep finding facts after facts every day, which are entirely new to me…

The encyclopedia incorporates some so-called “satellite topics” also. This reviewer for instance thoroughly enjoyed reading a chapter on “Journal Impact Factors” (vol 2, pages 335-345). Written by A.W.Jones of Sweden, a known authority in this field (Jones has over ten publications on journal impact factors alone, appearing in as influential journals as the “International Journal of Legal Medicine”), this chapter deals with such topics as impact factors, immediacy index, citation index, citation density and citation half-life.

The encyclopedia does not entitle one to get free online access to this work. This is in sharp contrast to an earlier encyclopedia (Encyclopedia of Forensic Sciences also published by Elsevier) where such an access was allowed. However there will be an online version available on Elsevier’s ScienceDirect platform in October 2005 but this would perhaps have an additional cost. For more information on this, readers may want to visit http://www.info.sciencedirect.com/reference_works/.

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The official site of this encyclopedia informs us that this encyclopedia is aimed at medical examiners, coroners, the police, prison medical officers, those involved in refugee medicine and allegations of torture, healthcare professionals also involved in this field, prison nurses, sexual

assault nurse examiners and custody nurses. This is indeed true. However so wide is its range and scope, that I would heartily recommend it to every medical and legal practitioner, if only to broaden one’s horizons of medico-legal knowledge.

Order *Encyclopedia of Forensic and Legal Medicine* by Clicking here

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Excerpts of this review on Elsevier's Official site