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. 7, NO. 1
Downloaded from www.anilaggrawal.com · ISSN 0972-8074 (Online) · https://www.anilaggrawal.com/ij/vol_007_no_001/others/america/letter.html

LETTER FROM AMERICA

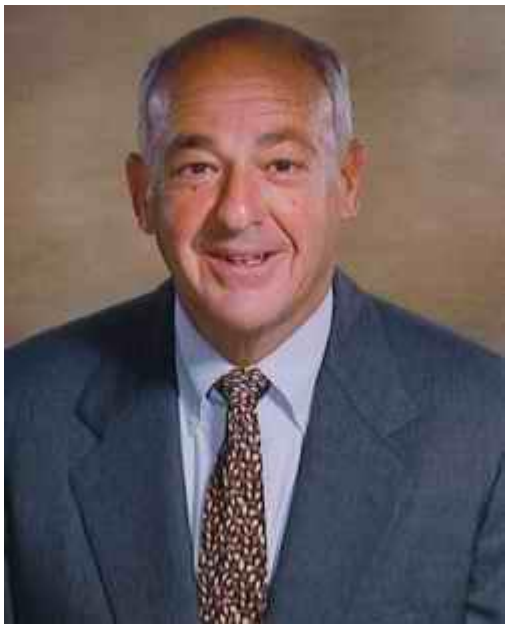
CITE THIS ARTICLE
Wecht C. The Role of the Forensic Scientist in Controversial, Politically Charged Death Investigations Internationally (Letter from America). *Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, 2006*; Vol. 7, No. 1 (January-June 2006): ; Published June 22, 2006,

Email Dr. Cyril Wecht by clicking here

The Role of the Forensic Scientist in Controversial, Politically Charged Death Investigations Internationally

-Cyril H. Wecht, M.D., J.D.
Past President, American Academy of Forensic Sciences
Past President, American College of Legal Medicine
USA

Cyril Wecht, USA



What do DNA testing, the O.J. Simpson murder trial, and "CSI" television programs have in common? All have contributed significantly to the ever increasing fascination and interest in the field of forensic science, not only in the United States, but throughout the world. Although the history of utilizing forensic scientific techniques and general concepts (simple and crude as they may have been in comparison to modern day practices) in the investigation of homicides and other criminal acts dates back thousands of years, it is doubtful that anyone would have predicted the phenomenal growth and development of this profession that we have witnessed in the past two decades.

Television shows, movies, and fictional novels that prominently feature forensic scientists as the major characters, with conspiracies and crimes that rely upon discovery and solution by forensic pathologists, toxicologists, psychiatrists, anthropologists, questioned document examiners and criminalists, have come to dominate their respective commercial categories. More importantly for societal purposes, insofar as both the civil and criminal legal arenas are concerned, contributions made by forensic scientists around the world have exceeded any other field of academic endeavor in achieving social justice. Whether it be the investigation of an individual murder or genocide; proving the sexual assault of one woman or the rape and pillage of an entire village; analysis of a single forged document or the Enron scandal; the determination of a single defendant's sanity or the evaluation of the mindset and acts of a tyrannical dictator - more and more, forensic scientists are being called upon to methodically, objectively, and impartially provide answers for local, national, and international law enforcement agencies, judges, and other governmental entities, as well as for private citizens, corporations and various other groups.

...Forensic scientists must be willing and prepared to play an important and highly sensitive role in death investigations that have international significance and far-reaching political ramifications. Utilization of universal knowledge and skills in resolving such controversial matters and thereby helping to achieve social justice should be an acknowledged objective of individual forensic scientists as well as national and international forensic scientific professional organizations...

Forensic science has no geographic boundaries. By its very nature, it is global in nature. Therein lies one of its greatest assets - it can be called upon at any time, applied, and utilized by trained, competent, and experienced experts in any country in the investigation and analysis of almost all criminal acts and many kinds of civil litigation. Many such cases have occurred over the past three decades in Asia, Africa, the Mideast, Europe, Australia, the Caribbean, and Central America. Some of these investigations have been undertaken at the behest of private citizens, and more often, under the official aegis of a foreign government. A few of these challenging, complex, and highly controversial matters have been extremely important and significantly relevant with regard to national elections, government policies, and even international diplomatic relations.

Forensic scientists must be willing and prepared to play an important and highly sensitive role in death investigations that have international significance and far-reaching political ramifications. Utilization of universal knowledge and skills in resolving such controversial matters and thereby helping to achieve social justice should be an acknowledged objective of individual forensic scientists as well as national and international forensic scientific professional organizations.

The critical nature of forensic scientific evidence in helping to defuse and resolve highly sensitive and potentially explosive allegations that occasionally have global ramifications needs to be

understood and appreciated by national governments and law enforcement agencies throughout the world.