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. 2
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Book Reviews: Technical Books Section

(Page 4 f - Review by Dr. George Paul, Singapore)

FEATURED BOOK



A GOOD INTRODUCTORY TEXT ON CLINICAL FORENSIC MEDICINE

Rating : 9.0
★★★★★★★★★
(9/5)

Clinical Forensic Medicine - A Physician's Guide, 2nd Edition, *Edited by* Margaret M. Stark. Hard Bound, 6" x 9". [Includes eBook/PDA on CD-ROM]. Foreword by Sir John Stevens, former Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service, London, UK
Humana Press Inc., 999 Riverview Drive, Suite 208, Totowa, New Jersey 07512; Publication Date: 11 April 2005. xvii + 438 pages, ISBN 1-58829-368-8, E-ISBN 1-59259-913-3. List price US $99.50 (10% discount with online order).

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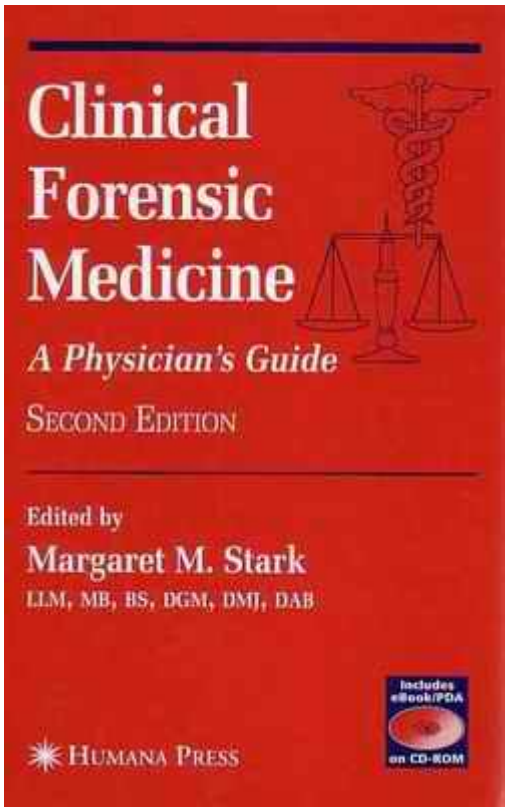

The book Clinical Forensic Medicine - A Physician's guide, 2nd ed. Edited by Margaret M Stark starts out presumptively as a desk top reference book. I had only the PDF e-mailed copy for review, but from the size of the printouts, it is not a small desk top book but a hefty 438 pages - including references, not counting the additional pages of forewords, list of contributors, index or contents, etc. All in all it is a veritable compendium on the subject. The initial introduction to the subject includes surveys from various parts of the world to encompass the scope of Clinical Forensic Medicine around the world. It covers the global clinical scene rather well in the first chapter. However the rest of the book focuses on practice of Clinical Forensic Medicine mainly in the UK, with an occasional cross-reference to its practice in the United States of America.

A lot of research has gone into the book, in trying to make it exhaustive update cum reference book. In that sense, it quite fulfils its role. It brings to light recent concerns in Clinical management issues, such as Crowd Managements, Medical issues relevant to Restraint, Care of Detainees, and Infectious Diseases, etc. issues that are currently increasing in importance as medico-legal ethics, and are featuring in defense of the under trial and detainees. In some of these chapters, the individual authors have been very meticulous in compiling nearly exhaustive data on their subjects.

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However despite all these efforts, some aspects of the data do fall short. For instance some aspects like sudden deaths from combination of benzodiazepines and buprenorphine sublingual tablets (Subutex), dissolved and injected intravenously by addicts are being reported as a cause for sudden death in Europe, Singapore, etc. don't find mention. Nor is date-rape after inducing the victim to drink spiked drinks with Ketamine (seen in some regions including South Asia) and other hypnotics/tranquilizers. Also, in the chapter on Injury Assessment, at 4.3, while discussing shotgun wounds and their appearance vis-à-vis range of fire, the fact that choking at the muzzle end can promote "balling of the shots" for a greater distance isn't mentioned. Or the fact that, for any reason, if the barrel of a shotgun is very short or shortened by sawing off; then these latter features

can cause earlier and wider dispersal and poorer penetration of the projectiles. These are some of the features, which by their absence somehow hold back this compendium from reaching the level of that of a master reference manual. However the discussions on the pros and cons of clinical examinations and the breathalyzer assessment for alcoholic intoxication and other such reviews are fairly exhaustive, given the limited scope of applications of the book.

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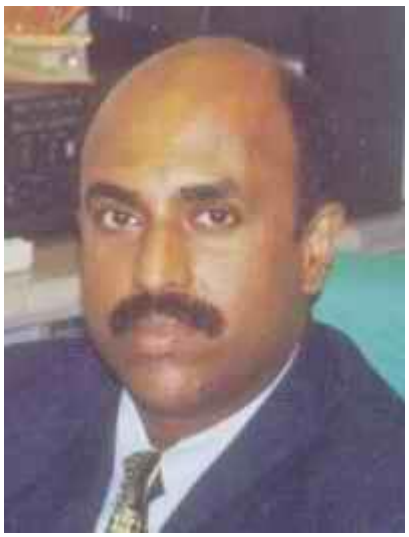
In some senses this book requires the reader to have some basic precepts of clinical forensic work. To such a person the book is a good refresher and desktop prescriber. Most other books on Clinical Forensic Medicine usually illustrate injuries to be observed in Non-accidental Injuries in Children, Sexual Assault, etc. but this book expects the reader to know what the authors are referring to.

With reference to a traditional duty of the Forensic Medical Examiners or Forensic Physicians, the book carries no chapter of scene-of-crime and scene-of-death examinations. But Injury assessment is well documented, as are specific injuries related to sexual assault and non- accidental injuries in children. The collection of ethical documents, diagrams and proformas, and a separate chapter focusing on Infectious Diseases and precautions for Forensic Physicians complete the book as a recommendable compendium for any Forensic Physician. The authors of the chapters are all renowned experts in their fields and their contributions form the substance of a very recommendable book. But time has passed since the publication of the book, and the new regulations affecting dealing with terror suspects, etc. would radically change the outlook of some of the chapters. I would expect that this change would introduce additional discussions and guidelines in some of the ethical issues liable to feature in some of these cases, to name a few.

-Dr. George Paul



-George Paul
George Paul is an avid reader, thinker and commentator. Born and brought up in India, he now lives in Singapore and earns his living as a forensic pathologist - one of the numerous professions he could have chosen for living, given his fertile mind. He can be contacted at George_PAUL@HSA.gov.sg

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