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Book Reviews: Technical Books Section

...AN EXCELLENT ADDITION TO FORENSIC LITERATURE ...this is an excellent textbook in forensic medicine. It is world wide in its scope and generally well written and understandable. Given the breadth of the field, the editors have done an excellent job of covering most of the important aspects of forensic medicine...

Forensic Medicine - Clinical and Forensic Aspects, 1st Edition, edited by Jason Payne-James, Anthony Busuttil and William Smock. Hard Bound, 9" x 11" (includes bibliographic references and index). Cambridge University Press, The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK. , . [initially published by Greenwich Medical Media Ltd., 4th Floor, 137 Euston Road, London NW1 2AA (Distributed worldwide by Plymbridge Distributors Ltd, and in the USA by Jamco Distribution)]. Publication Date 2003. xvi + 832 pages, ISBN 1-84110-026-9. Price £135.00

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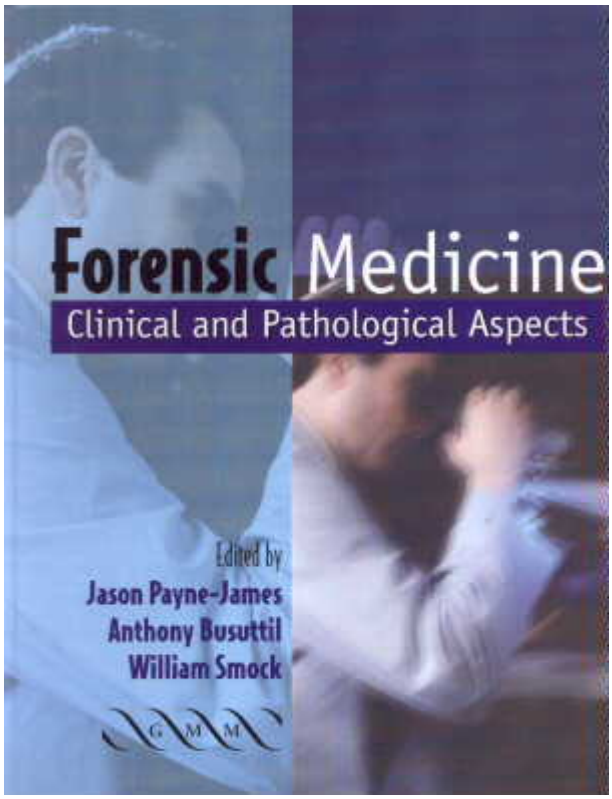

The new text of forensic medicine represents an ambitious project to cover the entire field of forensic medicine from examination of prisoners to determine their fitness for interrogation, through DNA testing, toxicology, odontology, pathology and anthropology. It covers 831 pages with fifty one chapters and 74 authors. Many of the authors are some of the most respected persons in their fields.

One of the major disappointments is the cost of the book. Currently, the book is listed at $310.00 US dollars on amazon.com, which makes it pretty well out of the range for most students and for actually quite a few practitioners of forensic medicine. This is quite unfortunate as this is an extremely useful book and could be the basis of a full year course on introduction to forensic medicine or forensic science. Additionally, this book could easily replace either Dr. DiMaio's of Dr. Spitz's books on forensic pathology as the "bible" of forensic pathology and medicine. Much of the cost probably comes from really excellent color photographs which illustrate many of the chapters. Unfortunately, it is probably not possible to utilize black and white photographs in the 21st century. However, even at the inflated cost, this book should be in the library of every institution dealing with forensic medicine whether death investigation, living person examinations for crimes, and institutions which teach these disciplines.

The reason that the book is so highly recommended is the breadth of the coverage. Nearly everything is contained in this one volume. Indeed, if one had to choose what book to have in one's library, as a practitioner of forensic medicine, this would be the choice.

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The second section is Causes and Investigation of Death and Injury. The first two chapters concern wound healing and time of death. Both are excellent in their coverage of this area. It would have been more appropriate to entitle the chapters time of wounding and time of death, but this is of little importance. The following 23 chapters cover the usual breakdown of death investigated by the forensic pathologist or forensic medical doctor. The chapter on Custody and Restraint Deaths is extremely helpful in dealing with this politically charged area. Included is a great discussion of Excited Mania deaths, whether from mental illness or substance abuse. Recommendations for care of the victims as well as investigations into their deaths are well done. Manner of death is covered with a series of hypothetical cases which presents this area quite well. The Gunshot chapter by Drs. DiMaio and Dana is extremely good. The photographs are excellent. The remaining chapters are all good or better.

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The third section is Practical Investigation and Management. On the whole, this section deals with the forensic medicine practice without death investigation. Indeed, if I were suggesting a revision, it would that section 2 should be Forensic Pathology and Section 3 would be Forensic Medicine. However, there are problems with using these headings, as the words are not well understood by persons from the USA or by other Persons. The USA seems to have forensic pathologists who primarily deal with the dead. The rest of the world, or most of the rest of the world, has practitioners of forensic medicine who deal with both the living and dead. Thus, the two labels overlap. Whatever it is entitled, this section contains seventeen chapters starting with the physiology of male and female sexual arousal and ending with medicinal drug poisoning.

It is the sexual arousal chapter which seems the most out of place chapter in the book. Particularly its status as the first chapter in the section is puzzling. Not to be critical of the content, this is quite good, although somewhat elementary. It just seems strange to have such a chapter in a book of forensic medicine. As I will discuss below, the elimination of this chapter could have provided room for some missing areas.

Also odd concerning the chapter placement is that the next chapter after sexual anatomy and physiology is age determination in the living, which is followed by adult sexual examination and

child sexual examination. It would have seemed more appropriate to put the examination chapters after the anatomy chapter and then the age. None of these are major problems with the book; they are just oddities of organization which detract somewhat from the message.

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The chapter on Physical Illness in custody is quite short and covers only epilepsy, cardiovascular disease and cardiovascular disease in any depth and this depth is shallow. Considering the superficiality of the coverage, this chapter would probably have been better left out as well.

There is a chapter on transportation medicine including death investigation. However, it is more oriented to aspects of living person investigation. Given that transportation deaths represent the leading cause of traumatic deaths in most parts of the world, and thus at least potentially the largest part of the case load of the death investigator, this lack of coverage is regrettable. This chapter, which in its 18 pages is quite good, if brief, should have been expanded into a portion on alcohol and drug testing in the living person and medical issues in licensing in Section 3 and then added back to the death investigation part in Section 2.

The chapter on examination of living persons, entitled assault and injury in the living, is extremely good. There are excellent photographs illustrating many common, and some uncommon lesions. Overall, this chapter is one of the best of the excellent ones in the book.

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The chapter on DNA is a good, if short, overview of the basis of DNA testing, some practical considerations in specimen collection and handling and the forensic applications of DNA testing. Again, although somewhat brief, this chapter is a solid foundation in the field of DNA testing.

Section 4 concerns Related Specialties. It is an interesting collection of chapters on Anthropology, Radiology, entomology and Anthropology. Also included, somewhat inappropriately in my view is a chapter entitled role and techniques of forensic hematogenetics which is more about DNA and paternity testing with a little about blood typing. On the whole, this chapter really belongs with the DNA chapter in the living person section. The chapters on psychiatry and psychology both provide a general overview of each specialty and are a great introduction. The chapter on statistical evaluation is certainly excellent.

…In summary, this is an excellent textbook in forensic medicine. It is world wide in its scope and generally well written and understandable. Given the breadth of the field, the editors have done an excellent job of covering most of the important aspects of forensic medicine…

The final chapter is on Report Writing. This is extremely important in courts which come from the Roman law tradition (most of Europe and some of the Middle East.) In these countries, the report of the forensic expert is often dispositive of a criminal case, and the chapter does a good job of

explaining the importance of the reports, and their accuracy in the English (Common Law) setting. The chapter discusses the US system reasonably well although quite superficially. Unfortunately, there is no coverage of the role of experts in the Civil Law world or of their reports. Such inclusion would have been quite beneficial.

In summary, this is an excellent textbook in forensic medicine. It is world wide in its scope and generally well written and understandable. Given the breadth of the field, the editors have done an excellent job of covering most of the important aspects of forensic medicine.

-Ronald Wright



-Ronald Wright
Dr. Ronald K. Wright is Associate Professor of Pathology and Director of Forensic Pathology Division at Jackson Memorial Hospital Miami, Florida. He can be contacted at rkw@rkwrightmd.com. Dr. Wright is on the left as you look at the photograph.

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