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. 11, NO. 2
Downloaded from www.anilaggrawal.com · ISSN 0972-8074 (Online) · https://www.anilaggrawal.com/ij/vol_011_no_002/reviews/tb/page010.html

Book Reviews: Technical Books Section

...AN AMAZING BOOK ...Winning a Wimbledon title makes someone special. But to be special among those specials, one has to win it the way Martina Navratilova did. And we have no hesitation in saying that Simpson's Forensic Medicine is to forensic medicine what Martina Navratilova is to Wimbledon, the best among the best...

Simpson's Forensic Medicine, 12th Edition, edited by Richard Shepherd. Softcover, 9.6" x 7.4" x 0.5". Hodder Arnold, 338 Euston Road, London NW1 3BH. Publication Date 2003. 192 pages, Illustrations: 10 B&W line, 135 colour halftones, 7 B&W halftones, ISBN: 0340764228, ISBN-13: 9780340764220. Price $59.50, £42.00.

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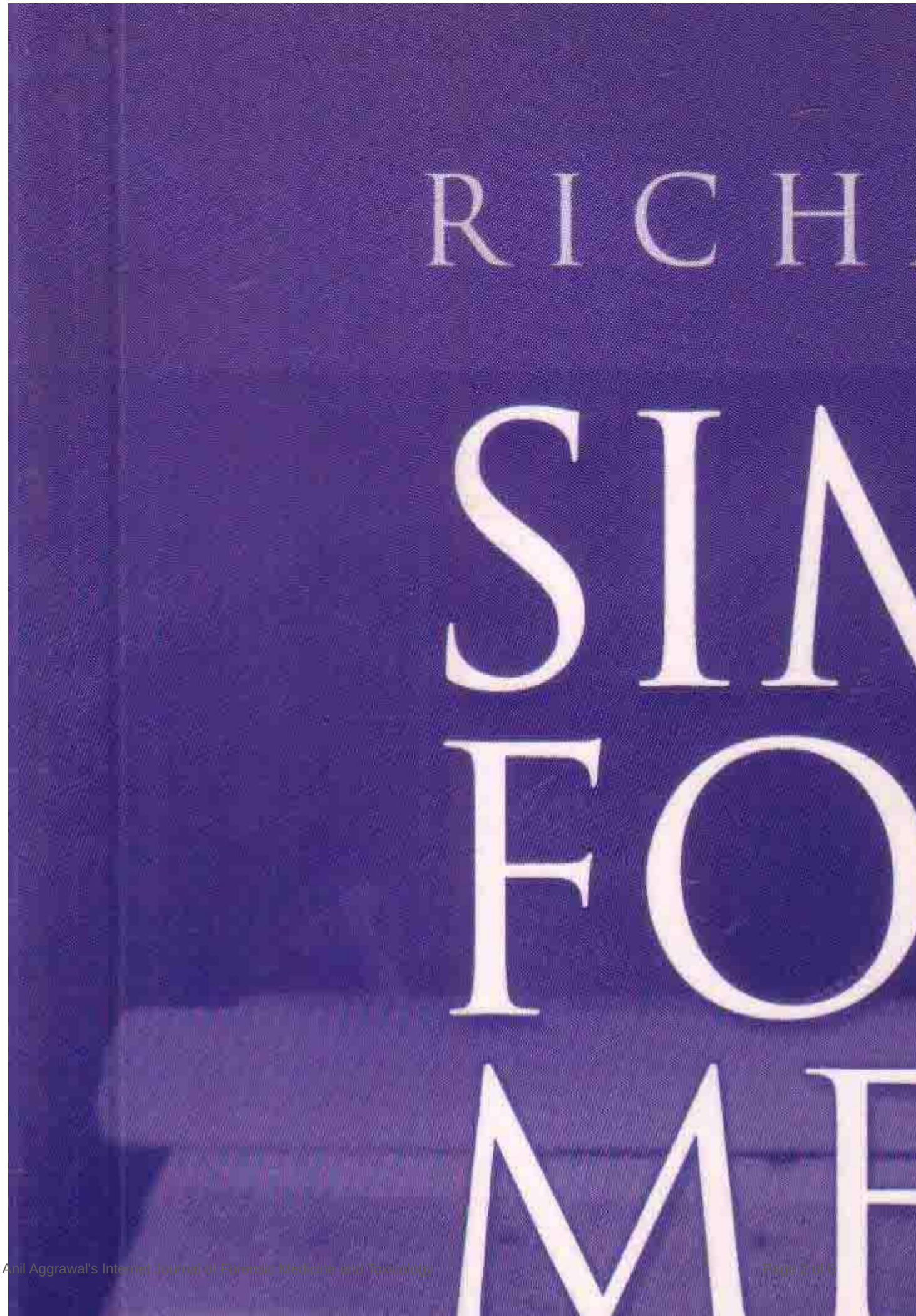
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Simpson's forensic medicine is a book that is written for undergraduate students, lawyers, judges etc.; basically for people who are not forensic experts but who are either beginners or need to have just a passing knowledge of the subject. So to compare it with any of those more illustrated and highly specific forensic pathology textbooks will amount to gross injustice to this book. So we have not compared this book with any of those books but have rather described its merits and demerits on the bases of its intended reading.

Simpson's forensic medicine is now fifty-seven years old, or we must say fifty-seven years young. In whatever way we may take it, the fact is that this book is still as relevant as it was when it was first published. Over the last half century of its existence, it has seen the birth and death of many books in forensic medicine. But this is one book that has retained its flavour, maybe even enhanced it.

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It has become some sort of a norm these days that any textbook on forensic medicine has to start with legal and ethical aspects of medicine. And the present book is no different. And like all other books the author describes the law of the land, i.e. of England. But in addition to these laws, some overview is also given about the laws, as they are prevalent in the USA. On one hand this compares the laws as they are in the two countries and secondly it tells that in spite of two very different healthcare delivery systems, the laws governing the medical profession are almost same. The first chapter describing the conduct of the doctor in the court and the way he should prepare for his appearance in the court is a must read for every doctor irrespective of the speciality. In view of the immense importance of this chapter, we felt that is should have been described in a little more detail so that the doctor going to the court should not feel totally out of place.

…An abrasion whether caused in pre-historic times, today or a few centuries down the line will appear same as long as the method of its causation remains the same. The same goes for other injuries like contusions, lacerations, stab wounds etc. But the change that may be expected is the presence of better quality photographs so that the reader may be able to understand these injuries better. And on this count the book gets a real thumbs-up…

Coming on to the ethics, the author has written both the Hippocratic oath and the oath as it is taken today. By going through both of them the reader can himself make out how much medical profession has changed (or has not changed depending on the reader's personal views) from the time of Hippocrates. Then there is also a table (table 2.1 page 10) where the author has given a brief synopsis of the various international conferences and the declarations that were made at them that have led to the development of medical science with respect to the rights and duties of the medical practitioners. The concepts of medical confidentiality and when it can be breached, consent in medical practice, negligence and its types etc. have been explained quite effectively. Something new that we found is the difference between "damage" and "damages" (page 16) as it is always felt that damages is just the plural of damage. This and many other such new concepts make this book truly remarkable.

When one goes to forensic medicine proper, there is much change one expects to find. An abrasion whether caused in pre-historic times, today or a few centuries down the line will appear same as long as the method of its causation remains the same. The same goes for other injuries like contusions, lacerations, stab wounds etc. But the change that may be expected is the presence of better quality photographs so that the reader may be able to understand these injuries better. And on this count the book gets a real thumbs-up. Not just the quality but also the variety of

photographs is something that has to be commended upon. They describe the various aspects of injuries, post mortem changes, identification features etc. quite effectively.

The other aspects of forensic medicine like firearm injuries, asphyxial deaths, infanticide, child and elderly abuse, sexual assaults etc. have been seen, read and observed so many times that there is nothing new that can be added to their description. But what stands this book apart from others is the presentation of these well-known facts. The way these age-old phenomena have been described using a free flowing, easy to understand language with proper supplementation with good quality and relevant photographs, tables, line diagrams etc. make it different and superior to other books.

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Review by -*Puneet Setia and Avneesh Gupta*





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