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Interview with Dr. Steven A. Koehler

Steven A. Koehler

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***Forensic Epidemiology*, the best selling book by Koehler. Click cover to read its review**

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Steven A. Koehler received his PhD and MPH degree from the University of Pittsburgh, Graduate School of Public Health. Dr. Koehler was formerly the Chief of the Epidemiology Division at the Allegheny County Medical Examiners Office in Allegheny County, PA.

He is an Associate Professor of the Forensic Science Program at Point Park University, Adjunct Associate Professor of epidemiology at the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health and Adjunct Associate Professor at the Duquesne School of Law. He has served in the Suicide Death Review committee, Child Death Review committee, the Firearm Death Review board and the Internal Monitoring Committee for the Center for Injury Research and Control. He is listed in Who's Who in Medicine and Health.

He is the author of more than 30 professional publications; a founding member, editorial board member, and column writer for the International Journal of Forensic Nursing, editor of the 5-volume set, FORENSIC SCIENCES (Matthew Bender), and the author of four books addressing topics from death investigation to forensic epidemiology.

Dr. Koehler is the founder and executive director of Forensic Medical Investigation, a collection of medical, forensic, and nursing experts with the purpose of providing comprehensive forensic/medical death investigations. His expertise is in the field of forensic epidemiology, death investigation research, and general forensic investigation. His company has investigated suspicious deaths, fatal food outbreaks, and medical product contamination. Dr. Koehler has appeared as a frequent guest on numerous TV, radio shows, and has been interviewed by local and national newspapers discussing various issues relating to forensic scientific subjects including accidental drug overdose deaths, homicide trends, and the Lizzie Borden case.

Dr. Koehler has lectured at numerous medical, law, and other graduate schools, as well as many colleges and universities, and numerous professional organizations and governmental agencies, including Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public Health, Drug Enforcement Administration, and Duquesne University School of Law. He has presented at numerous conferences including the National Injury Prevention & Injury Conference, International Associated of Forensic Nurses, National Medical Examiner Association, US and Canadian Academy of Pathology, Food and Drug Administration, and the American Academy of Neurology. Currently, a Professor of Forensic Science at Point Park University he teaches forensic science and research methods in the fields of forensic science. Dr. Koehler is also a Pathology Assistant at the Veterans Administration Hospital. Dr. Koehler currently resides in Allegheny County.

This journal reviewed his seminal work on *Forensic Epidemiology (CRC Press, 2009)* in the current issue of our journal. We at the "Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology" approached him for an online interview and he graciously agreed. The interview was conducted for well a month. Some excerpts.. ..)

Dr. Steven A. Koehler (Click picture to enlarge)



Q. 1. Please explain forensic epidemiology to our readers in plain and simple non-technical words.

A.



Forensic epidemiology is the field of study that has combined the science of Epidemiology and Forensics. Forensic epidemiology combines epidemiological methods with standard criminal investigation techniques to analyze certain types of deaths for which there is a suspicion that they were intentionally caused such as an act of terrorism.

Click here to download Dr. Koehler's CV.

Q. 2. Why do you think a study of this specialty is necessary?

A.



The field of forensic epidemiology can offer critical information to an ongoing criminal investigation. They can provide the following: a profile of homicide victims, therefore alert individuals that fit that specific profile to be more cautious; geographic crime mapping that can assist in narrowing down the area under surveillance, and alert law enforcement and public health officers of above normal levels of certain diseased an indication of a possible biologic threat. In addition, they can alter the authorities and the public of an increased number of deaths associated with a specific product a possible indication of tampering or terrorism.

Q. 3. When did the study of forensic epidemiology start? Who started it?

A.



The term “Forensic Epidemiology” was first associated with bioterrorism when the term was used by the former chief deputy of the USSR bio-weapon program, Dr. Ken Alibek in 1999. Forensic Epidemiology was then defined as the activity that would help distinguish natural from man-made epidemics. After the Anthrax attacks in September and October of 2001, Dr. Gerberding, a senior official with the Centre for Disease and Control (CDC) National Centre for Infectious Disease, defined Forensic Epidemiologist as one that would be trained to respond to bioterrorism attacks as well as other public health emergencies.

Q. 4. How did you get interested in this field?

A.



My interest in the field of forensic started out as working in the local coroner's office as an Assistant Chief Deputy Coroners after graduating college. Then I entered the master and then the doctoral program at the Graduate School of Public Health, studying Epidemiology. I proposed a new curriculum that combined the core principles of epidemiology with forensic investigation. I was the first to graduate with a PhD in forensic epidemiology.

Q. 5. What specialty have you specialized in?

A.



I use my 15 plus years of experience in forensic death investigation combined with my education in public health to investigate many different types of deaths from a unique perspective. I also used my years of experience to create Forensic Medical Investigation a private investigation consulting company.

Dr. Steven A. Koehler (Click picture to enlarge)



Q. 6. How did you conceive the idea of writing this book? How much time did you take to complete it?

A.



I saw a great need for a book that explains the roles of a forensic epidemiologist and illustrates how they apply the principles of epidemiology to forensic cases such as homicide, suicide, motor vehicle accidents to list a few. I also wanted to highlight the vast amount of underutilized data available at the Medical Examiner/Coroners offices. The book took me about one year to complete.

Q. 7. If someone wants to start forensic epidemiology in his institution, how should he go about it?

Click here to download Dr. Koehler's CV.

A.



Institutions that want to develop a Forensic Epidemiology program they should model it after the core epidemiology classes taught in most Graduate Schools of Public Health. This should be followed by classes in basic death investigation, forensic evidence collection, post-mortem investigation, and an understanding of the roles of the various departments in a crime laboratory. Then, they should contact their local Medical Examiners/Coroners office to set up an internship programs to permit students with first-hand experience in how real deaths are investigated.



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