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Book Reviews: Technical Books Section

...USEFUL DESK REFERENCE ...I would like to have the book on my reference desk for case laws...

Modi's Medical Jurisprudence & Toxicology, 23rd Edition, Edited by K. Mathiharan and Amrit K Patnaik. Paper back, 9.5"x7".
Lexis Nexis Butterworths, (A division of Reed Elsevier India Pvt Ltd), 14th Floor, Vijaya Building, 17, Barakhamba Road, New Delhi-110001, INDIA. Publication Date 2006. xxxiv + 1176 pages (section 1) + 794 pages (section 2), ISBN 81-8038-129-3. Rs.695.00

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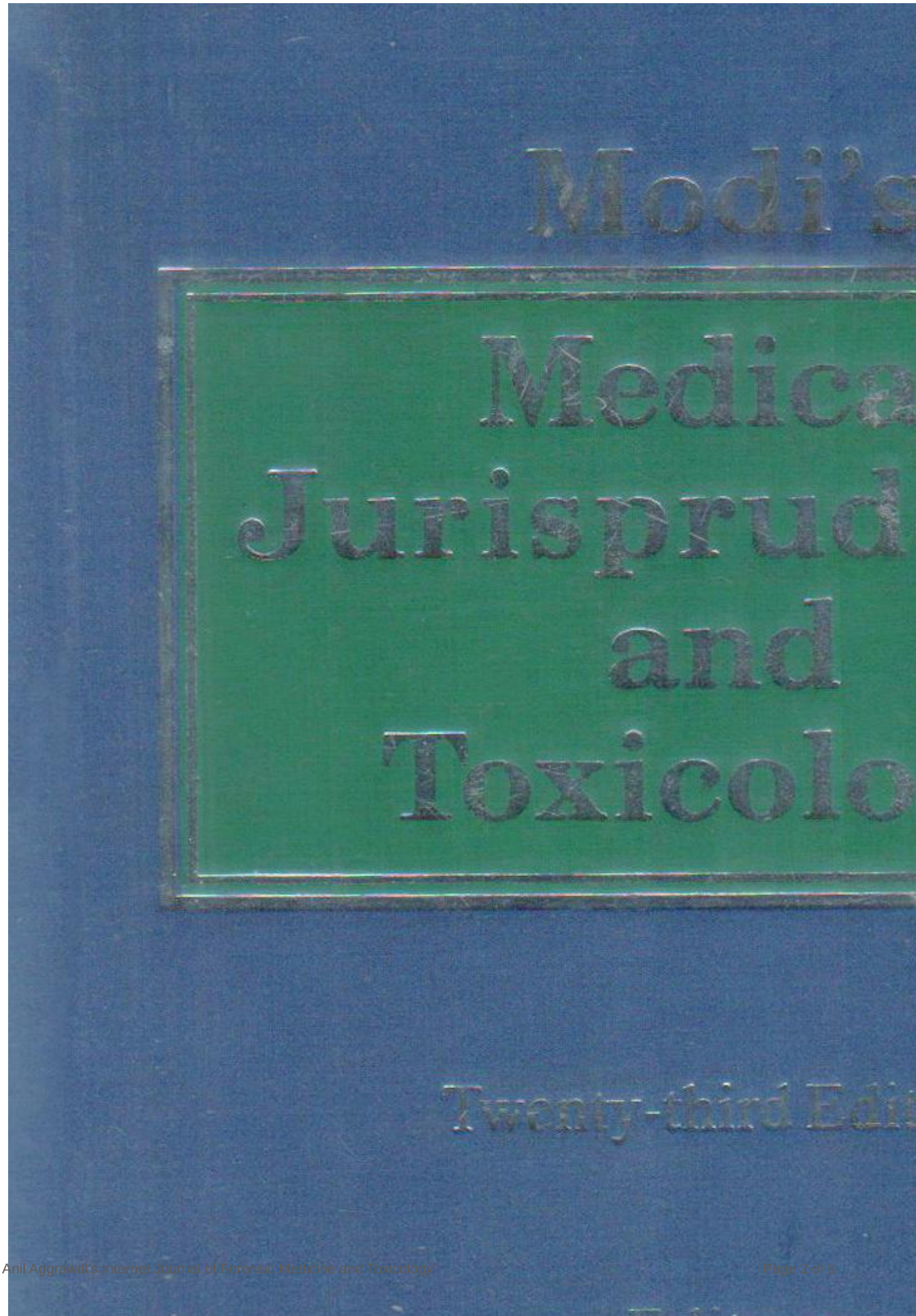
Modi's
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Twenty-third Edi

I firmly believe that writing a book is an art and a job of responsibility and to edit a book is rather greater art and job of greater responsibility. While editing a book editor has to preserve the body and spirit of original work while writing a book this limitation is not there. When it comes to edit Modi's Medical Jurisprudence and Toxicology, “the holy Geeta of Indian Medical Jurisprudence” the responsibility of editors increases proportionately many folds. With this understanding that how difficult is the task of editors I tried to review the 23rd edition of Modi's Medical Jurisprudence and Toxicology.

For my task I read the book, screened it and compared it page-to-page, reference-to-reference and content-to-content with the 22 nd edition.

The book has about 620 additional pages and 16 new plates of photographs and charts etc. Preface to 23 rd edition does mention that ten new chapters have been added in the book on various current topics of forensic interest.

My concept of Medical Jurisprudence and Toxicology (this is the title of the book also) is that it should have medical content, jurisprudence content and toxicology content. When it is to be edited all three sections required to be edited and updated.

I am very pleased that Jurisprudence content of the book has been dealt with and updated excellently. Almost all new chapters, which have been referred to in the preface, are also jurisprudence content oriented and very nicely written. But it cannot be said when it comes to comment on medical content and toxicology content of the book. In fact, they are poorly edited. Whatever new references I found in these parts of the text are more of legal type in the form of case law etc rather than or in addition to legal references, developments that took place in these subjects in last few years. Editors have used references as unknown as Madras Medical College Magazine. But it is surprising and disappointing that references from national and international journals on forensic medicine and toxicology are very few and far away. While at present many Indian and foreign journals on forensic medicine and toxicology are being regularly published and they are reasonably easily available. Lack of editing of these sections is clearly seen. We see some of the examples-

Word ‘Death Certificate' is loosely used. Treating doctor actually issues after the death of the patient is ‘ medical certificate of cause of death' popularly known as MCCD in W.H.O. circle and not the death certificate in technical and legal sense.

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Utus paste still finds a place under the heading of Methods Employed for Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) but the extra aminotic methods and M.T.Pill do not.

Though collection of stomach wash and other excreta mentioned for medico legal purposes, but the concept of analysis of such material and blood for diagnosis and management of case of poisoning does not find a place.

Aluminum phosphide poisoning is second most common fatal poisoning in India in general and in some places like Rajasthan it is becoming number one. But not even a single word is added or edited on this topic.

Most of the annual reports of various chemical analyzers remain of Modi's era. Many references of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century still find place, which are now not contemporary. Such references should have been replaced by the newer and recent references.

Medical, toxicological and even case laws lose their relevance with time and all these require editing. This editing is not seen in the book.

Going through the credentials of the main editor (Prof Mathiharan) it becomes very clear and obvious that the field in which he has worked whole of his life, that is ethics and law, have been excellently done while his attempt falls short in other fields of the book. In the book it is not clear what was the role of Prof. Patnaik as a co- editor. Does it mean that we have entered in an era where it is not advisable for one person to edit the book, which contains various topics on Medical Jurisprudence and Toxicology? My answer to this question is in affirmative. While contributions from experts in various fields were taken for the editing of 22nd edition this does not seem so in case of 23 rd edition.

Now some technical points-

1. The size, shape and the bulk of the book are very inconvenient to hold while reading.
2. Either the size or the font type is changed from last edition. The letters appear small and it is not easy to read book for persons like me who are fifty plus. Most of the lawyers, senior forensic experts and judges fall in this fifty plus category.
3. Deleting old and irrelevant text and references could have reduced the bulk. It could have been better to print it in either two columns or bisecting it into two volumes.
4. Numbering of pages is different for Medical Jurisprudence section and Toxicology section
5. Index is also separate for both sections.
6. I do not know what advantage Point 4 and 5 give to publisher but I certainly know that these cause inconvenience to me as a reader.
7. Both indices are too small in context of the book. I could not find dying declaration and Aluminium phosphide in the indices.
8. At places there are mistakes of syntax, repetition of paragraphs, and spellings.
9. At places tables are put out of context.
10. Titles of some of the photographs are ambiguous and not self-explanatory.
11. Most of the photographs, even when required, do not have scale and arrow.
12. Plates are put together at the end of the section. In present times when excellent printing facilities are easily available photographs should have been incorporated at the relevant portions of the text along with their mention in the text.

The book has lost its relevance for undergraduate students. It does not give any advantage over other available textbooks as far as medical and toxicological contents are concerned. However, I would like to have the book on my reference desk for case laws.

-BD Gupta

-BD Gupta
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