

BOOK REVIEW

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Review of: *Forensic Neuropathology, Second Edition*

REFERENCE: Leestma JE. *Forensic neuropathology, 2nd edn*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press/Taylor & Francis Group, 2009, 708 pp.

This new edition of the publication, which has served as a major reference source to the forensic community for over two decades, becomes available to the readers contemporaneously with several other high quality publications from the field, and it is largely assumed that such a treatise is to reflect previously established teaching concepts with inevitable apodictic flavor. Jan Leestma simply proves the opposite through this genuine effort of complete rewriting of the original text and realigns it with decades of personal experience from his busy practice as a consulting neuropathologist. The endeavor is surely re-enforced by the highly acclaimed contributors.

The comprehensive work has been organized in nine expansive chapters, accompanied by the relevant color photographs and up-to-date references. Chapter 1 defines the medicolegal role of a neuropathology consultant in our judicial system, and with Chapter 2 offers an opportunity to any interested medical professional to grasp the essence of what courts expect from expert interpretation of scientific evidence, a notion unfortunately too often missed in daily work. Beyond the practical analysis of the Rules of Evidence, these chapters are a fine reminder of the ever-growing body of scientific knowledge as a non-negotiable imperative for a medicolegal expert to keep up to date, not only with one's own discipline, but also with the multidisciplinary aspects of the issues considered.

Chapters 3 and 4 provide a rather detailed, easy to read, coverage of forensic aspects of general neuropathology of adults and infants/children, essential to everyday practice of forensic pathology. This is where neuropathology truly goes "public" and allows students of the discipline, regardless of their level, equally easy access and understanding of the topics. All this is backed up by

adequate demonstrative photographs that leave no ambiguity as references in diagnostic work. Mechanisms of control of intracranial homeostasis and disorders thereof are addressed in Chapter 5, which also includes the issues of artificial life support and brain death.

The 220 pages that follow make up Chapters 6 (Physical Injury to the Nervous System) and 7 (Child Abuse: Neuropathology Perspectives) that can easily represent a separate volume.

Chapter 6 benefits from the able input of Kirk Thibault who provides the basic concepts of biomechanics of cranio-cerebral and spinal trauma in a sequential and understandable fashion. The injury patterns are given ample attention with emphasis on correlation with physical circumstances at the scene that are specific for the case in consideration. The authors rightly point out the inappropriate and misleading notion of "diffuse axonal injury" and other confusing misnomers. Chapter 7 provides the essentials for diagnostic approach to suspected child abuse, but also deals openly and unambiguously with some of the hottest controversies in forensic medicine of our times through an objective analysis of the entrenched dogmatic concept of the so-called "shaken baby syndrome."

The discussion of gunshot wounds and other penetrating injuries of the central nervous system, in my view, has been unduly given a status of a chapter (Chapter 8), rather than being a subset of Chapter 6, in this otherwise outstanding scientific discourse. The text concludes with Chapter 9 (Forensic Aspects of Complex Neural Functions) that contains useful information about commonly encountered problems in the caseload of a medicolegal investigator of death.

Overall, the text is done in an unbiased, highly objective manner. The author/editor deserves full credit for adherence to the cherished teaching principle of Antisthenes—"The most useful piece of learning for the uses of life is to unlearn what is untrue."

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