

BOOK REVIEW

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Review of: *Forensic Epidemiology*

REFERENCE: Koehler SA, Brown PA. Forensic epidemiology. Boca Raton, LA: CRC Press, Taylor & Francis Group, 2010, 287 pp.

More and more frequently, medical examiners and coroners are being recognized as a valuable source of data for epidemiologic studies. Deaths investigated by medical examiners and coroners tend to be of public health significance (suicides, homicides, unintentional drug overdoses) and an impressive volume of relevant information is collected during medicolegal death investigations. Many epidemiologists, however, have little or no previous experience working with their local medical examiner or coroner, or the data generated by death investigations. Now, with the publication of *Forensic Epidemiology*, epidemiologists have a clear, well-written road map as to how to access and effectively utilize this tremendous source of data.

With 13 chapters and at a tidy 287 pages, the book is an excellent introduction to forensic pathology for epidemiologists looking to collaborate with medical examiners and coroners. The summaries of both basic epidemiology and the evolution of forensic pathology are focused, useful, and interesting. Any epidemiologist considering approaching a local medical examiner or coroner, but who has not previously worked with death investigation data, would do well to read Chapter 4, "The Operation of a Medical Examiner's or Coroner's Office," to familiarize themselves with procedures and terminology. Throughout the book, the reader will find succinct explanations and definitions of forensic terms, which are particularly helpful for epidemiologists who may not have a medical background.

Chapters on specific manners of death begin with overviews of how each is investigated and the pertinent information collected.

The authors then provide examples, primarily from the medical examiner in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, of how information on each manner of death can be analyzed and presented by a forensic epidemiologist. Additional information is included on subjects any forensic epidemiologist will need to be familiar with to effectively utilize ME/C data, including death certificates, decomposition, types of injuries, and special investigations, including psychological autopsies and bioterrorism surveillance. Given the enormous variety and depth of topics the authors needed to cover, they have done an admirable job of presenting them concisely yet comprehensively, with surprising nuggets of information along the way to keep the reader interested.

Minor quibbles include a few errors, such as referring to NAME as "NMEA" and a tendency to overstate generalities, such as "the forensic epidemiologist examines and codes every death that is processed through the ME/C office," when this is not always the case. Using footnotes throughout, to give specific examples of each type of study referred to, would be helpful for researchers looking for guidance in using specific types of forensic data. However, these are minor issues and certainly do not detract from the utility of the book.

I will be recommending this book to fellow epidemiologists, as well as epidemiology students interested in a unique niche for their careers. It is a valuable and much needed resource for the increased utilization of the wealth of ME/C data in epidemiologic studies. Ideally, it will inspire epidemiologists to get to know their local medical examiners, and help build lasting, mutually beneficial relationships between the fields of epidemiology and forensic pathology.

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