



■ **'Forensic Pathology'**, D. Di Maio, V. Di Maio (1993) ISBN 0849395038 £55 ([CRC Press Forensics](#))

A favourite with American students of forensic pathology, this textbook is packed full of practical advice from 2 eminent forensic pathologists, having 60 years of experience in this subject between them.

After taking the reader through an informative introduction to the 'Medico-legal Investigative Systems' in operation in the USA - the Coroner and Medical Examiner systems - the authors turn their attention to injury patterns and mechanisms of traumatic death.

As an observer from the UK, the authors comments on the operation of the American Coroner systems are interesting to note - they believe that this system is not professional enough, and that the Medical Examiner system, led by a qualified forensic pathologist rather than a physician, or lay-person, is the only way that a quality service can be provided to the public.

With the current media spotlight on the system of pathology service provision in the UK, and in particular the manner in which autopsies are carried out etc, a 'medical examiner' system is being suggested by some commentators. Interested parties will therefore be well advised to seek the views of people like the authors of this text, to ensure that any new system is superior to that which it is replacing, and doesn't suffer from the errors that the USA systems have suffered in the past, and now seem to be working out solutions for. Adequate resourcing and staffing of any new system being proposed will be the key to a quality service that meets the demands of the public and the administration of justice.

Of interest to the student of forensic medicine, will be the author's 'philosophy' on how to approach a case - they take the reader through the process step-by-step, and compare it to the clinical approach that all doctors take - that is taking a history, carrying out an examination, and then ordering appropriate tests and investigations. In the case of a dead body, the history does not come from the patient, but from relatives, witnesses, the police, treating physicians and hospital/ medical records etc.

Textbooks on forensic pathology are often quite dogmatic about methods of estimating time since death. Although most give the reader the impression that temperature measurements, post-mortem lividity, rigor-mortis and other such techniques are not completely infallible, they don't actually indicate that they are actually quite unreliable, and are subject to wide margins of error.

The authors of this book leave the reader in no doubt of this fallibility, and go so far as to say that it is only the forensic 'charlatans' that provide the police with extremely accurate estimates of time since death - the true professional is much more cautious, and 'wishy-washy'. Excellent advice for the newcomer to the subject!

The style of the text is more 'conversational' than many other texts on this subject, and at times it can seem quite inappropriate - however, it does make for an enjoyable read, as one is sometimes forgetful of the fact that one is reading a textbook!

The presentation of the text could be made more appealing - there are few subtitles to break up the text, and the illustrations are, for the most part, black and white - giving the reader the overall impression of 'dullness'. However, the content can't be faulted, and the photos are extremely informative.

The section on knife wounds, for example, is extremely clear, and leaves the reader in no doubt as to what a single edged knife wound looks like, and this is the first time that I have seen a clear photo of a serrated knife wound, and actually seen the distinctive features that I have read about so often in other textbooks.

Toxicology is covered well in this book, with an excellent summary table providing the reader with therapeutic, toxic and fatal blood levels of all of the most commonly encountered drugs and poisons etc.

Overall, this textbook gets a 'thumbs-up' - it's clear style and 'conversational' style make it an enjoyable read, and the theory is impressively dealt with. There is one fairly major drawback to this book, however - the complete lack of any chapters on gunshot wounds.

This is presumably because one of the authors has a book dedicated to this subject (see below). If the reader wishes to purchase one textbook on the subject, this book is not the one for them. What starts off as a reasonable £64 jumps up to £114 if one also buys the 'companion' volume on gunshot wounds. For that price, one could buy a larger reference text, such as Mason's 'Pathology of Trauma' ([see my review](#)).

NB. The second edition of this book is now out - order it from Amazon.com. (ISBN 084930072X \$95)

