



Current position:

Medical Investigator, Office of the Medical Investigator, New Mexico

Education history:

Undergraduate Education – Wabash College

Medical School – University of Illinois School of Medicine

Residency Program – Southwestern Medical School, Dallas, TX

Fellowship – Dallas County Medical Examiner's Office, Dallas, TX

HOW DID YOU INITIALLY BECOME INTERESTED IN FORENSIC PATHOLOGY?

One day as a sophomore medical student studying in the medical school library and nearly brain dead from trying to memorize the Krebs cycle, I took a break to browse through the stacks. I came across a copy of “Mostly Murder” by Sir Sydney Smith and became fascinated that a medical education could lead to a career in death investigation. This stayed in the back of my mind as I progressed through the clinical years in medical school where I found that, as an introvert, I much preferred solving problems rather than treating patients. Nonetheless, I took a rotating internship and then a first year of pathology residency at The Bassett Hospital in Cooperstown, NY, and began looking at continuing general pathology training in Boston, when I learned that one of the former trainees at the Bassett Hospital, Charles Petty, was the Medical Examiner in Dallas. I visited Dr. Petty in Dallas to see what a forensic pathologist really did. He took me out to a light plane crash in a Dallas suburb and to the autopsy room, where I still remember a woman with a head injury caused by a metal piece that had fallen off a junk truck and bounced off the highway through her windshield. I was impressed with the operation and with the chance to work with him, so I moved to Dallas for my training.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR ASPIRING FORENSIC PATHOLOGISTS, INCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS TO MATCH INTO A PATHOLOGY RESIDENCY PROGRAM AND ACCEPTANCE INTO A FORENSIC PATHOLOGY FELLOWSHIP?

Concentrate on a good science background and strive to be the best physician you can by understanding the scientific basis for disease and injury. Don't be in too big a hurry to get into full time forensics. In residency learn as much basic pathology, in all the other sub-specialties, as possible. You will have plenty of time in your forensic fellowship to learn forensic pathology. Look for a fellowship where can identify one of the faculty as a good mentor.

WHAT IS THE MOST REWARDING ASPECT OF BEING A FORENSIC PATHOLOGIST?

Solving the everyday and occasional complicated cases. Savoring those "ah ha!" moments when you figure out what really happened in a case.

WHAT IS THE GREATEST CHALLENGE OF BEING A FORENSIC PATHOLOGIST?

Keeping my equanimity. Making many decisions of cause and manner of death that are debatable and controversial and finding that criticism can be profound and sometimes personal.

Learning to deal with the grief of the family and friends of the decedents without being judgmental.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES/CHALLENGES OF FORENSIC PATHOLOGY TODAY?

Necessity to interest more physicians to become forensic pathologists.

Convincing government agencies to fiscally support medical examiner systems.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST UNEXPECTED FINDING YOU HAVE ENCOUNTERED DURING A CASE?

Large diamond in the stomach of a strangled young woman.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT WORKING WITH YOUR TEAM?

Discussing the interesting cases of the day, of course.

WHO IS YOUR ROLE MODEL AND WHY?

Dr. Charles Hirsch, former Chief Medical Examiner, NYC. Best logical forensic thinker; great colleague; good friend.

WHAT ARE YOUR HOBBIES AND HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN A WORK-LIFE BALANCE?

A good round of golf now and then.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE WORK SOUNDTRACK AND WHY?

I usually prefer no background music or sound when I'm doing a case. Vocalists distract me. If I have to have background music, I prefer classical.

WHAT IS YOUR MOST-LIKED MEAL AT YOUR FAVORITE LOCAL RESTAURANT?

Huevos Rancheros with New Mexico Hatch green chili at Duran's.