

Barbara A. Sampson, M.D., Ph.D.



Current position:

Chief Medical Examiner of the City of New York

Education history:

Medical School: Weill Cornell Medical College, 1994

Residency Program: Anatomic and Clinical Pathology, 1994-1998, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Boston, MA

Fellowships:

Cardiovascular Pathology, 1997-1998, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Boston, MA

Forensic Pathology, 1998-1999

Other: Ph.D., Rockefeller University, 1993

HOW DID YOU INITIALLY BECOME INTERESTED IN FORENSIC PATHOLOGY?

As the daughter of two physicians, I was always going to be a physician. Dinner conversation was often about what kind of physician I would be. My father, an internist, when I was about 10 years old, suggested pathology. He told me a pathologist is the physician's physician. I loved the sound of that! My mother then told me about forensic pathology, where I could practice medicine at the crossroads of both public health and criminal justice. Everything I learned about the field only increased my interest over the years.

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

The most rewarding part of our field is honestly and compassionately answering questions for families and loved ones at the worst time of their lives using the finest science and medicine.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR MOST MEMORABLE CASE AND WHY?

My early research interest was in microbiology. The investigation of West Nile encephalitis in 1999 in NYC is the most memorable investigation in which I have participated. It

required not only in-depth neuropathology examination, but also collaboration with public health officials in many agencies. Who would have ever thought I would be able to study an emerging infectious disease in NYC? Our experience with Covid-19 and in planning for management of Ebola cases were also challenging experiences in the microbiology realm.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT WORKING WITH YOUR TEAM?

My favorite aspect of working with my team is the camaraderie. We have a very difficult job, both physically and emotionally. It is of the utmost importance that you trust your team and enjoy working with them. When the going gets tough, which it will, you will be spending a lot of time together. Knowing that they have your back is critical.

WHO IS YOUR ROLE MODEL AND WHY?

I am fortunate to have several outstanding role models for various aspects of my career. As a forensic pathologist, my role model is Dr. Charles Hirsch. His steadfast leadership of the NYC office and of our fellowship program for 24 years is remarkable. His compassion, professionalism, strength, and firm belief in science and medicine are inspirational. He led this office through 9/11, the largest US homicide investigation. His commitment to those families, to make as many identifications as possible, continues today. We quote his famous "Hirschisms" regularly. One of my favorites (and one every forensic pathologist should take to heart) is "For a difference to be a difference, it has to make a difference!"