

Steven Clark, PhD



Current position:

Director: Occupational Research and Assessment, Inc

Education history:

B.A.A. Industrial Supervision and Management, Central Michigan University, December 1975

M.A. Industrial Technology, Eastern Michigan University, May 1982.

Ph.D. Education, Curriculum and Instruction, Michigan State University, June 1987.

Doctoral research, Department of Counseling and Educational Psychology, reliability and validity testing of computer-generated occupational assessments for certification, licensure and program completion.

HOW DID YOU INITIALLY BECOME INTERESTED IN FORENSIC PATHOLOGY?

In November 1993, I was a university professor at a small school in Michigan, teaching and doing consulting work with several companies in the Midwest. At that time, I was several months into a large occupational analysis project involving job redesign with integrated assessment testing for the Saint Joseph Mercy Hospital System. This background story is important because the St. Joe project involved the majority of the system's employees and the three unions who represented them--everyone from the custodians, skilled trades mechanical/technical, to medical technicians, and nursing staff. The only unaffected employees were exempt hospital administrative staff and the doctors. Even in hindsight, that was hard job.

Now to answer the question: "How did you initially become interested in forensic pathology?" Well, it was Thanksgiving weekend and my childhood friend Jeffrey Jentzen and I were back in our hometown for the holiday weekend, catching up and telling stories at his brother's house, as was the tradition. During the "What are you doing now?" conversation, Jeff (who was the Chief Medical Examiner in Milwaukee) was interested in the St. Joe story, and asked if I'd be interested in coming to Milwaukee and working with his medicolegal investigators to possibly help "standardize" some level of professional training and promotion strategy for the staff? I asked him if "medicolegal" was a real word... and here we are nearly thirty years later. I cannot overemphasize the significance of that day; it was life changing for me.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR INDIVIDUALS ASPIRING TO JOIN THE FORENSIC PATHOLOGY WORKFORCE?

Three things: Skill, knowledge, and ability. There are few occupations that *require* such high levels of competence in each domain of learning: psychomotor (skill), cognitive (knowledge), and affective (ability) to perform successfully and consistently over time.

1. *Skill*. Autopsy performance requires the ability to dissect the human body (without destroying it). This requires a high-level hand-eye coordination (perception), the ability to manipulate tools skillfully (skilled movement), and in some cases sheer strength (fitness), all while looking, feeling, and smelling for things that do or don't make sense – given the circumstances.

2. *Knowledge*. Forensic pathologists must walk the bridge between science and medicine, possessing a working knowledge of medical specialties that cross traditional “practice” boundaries--from emergency medicine to obstetrics, from radiology to anesthesiology and specialties I cannot pronounce and do not reside in my spellcheck. In addition, forensic pathologists must have a pretty good grasp on the laws of physics.

Regarding the performance of the forensic autopsy, I've been told by multiple forensic pathologists over the years “Homicides are easy, it's the subtle naturals that test you.”

3. *Ability*. Understanding how people behave, respond to situations, provide feedback, and interact with those around them. Forensic pathologists must be able to describe and explain their findings to others, while adapting, behaving and simply “playing-well” in whatever sandbox they find themselves in – from kitchen to courtroom.

WHAT IS THE MOST REWARDING ASPECT OF BEING A PART OF THE FORENSIC PATHOLOGY COMMUNITY?

This is going to be a two-part answer, and the first may sound a little corny. *First, the people who do this work*. The forensic pathologists (and staff) have given me experiences and stories you couldn't make up. I get the rare opportunity to work closely with people who are passionate about their work and want to make a difference. However, it's the friendships that are most rewarding.

Second, to see the work we've done stand the test of time is hugely rewarding. Consensus-driven standards development, by design reflect the expertise within the group. But, more importantly, the personalities in the room drive the group – and, with forensic pathologists, that's a lot of personality. The “boil room” atmosphere of workgroup meetings was challenging and sometimes just plain hard to control. Ask anyone who participated, everyone brought their “A-game” and I think the results speak for themselves.

Most rewarding projects involving forensic pathologists:

- Medicolegal Death Investigation Training Text.
- Medicolegal Death Investigator Pre/Post Training Assessments (now the ABMDI).

- Death Investigation: A Guide for the Scene Investigator.
- National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) and Associated National Training Academies.
- Forensic Autopsy Performance Standards.
- Sudden Unexplained Infant Death Investigation (SUIDI) and Associated National Training Academies.
- NAME's Inspection and Accreditation inspector training.

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

I worry about what appears to be the loss of art and science in forensic pathology. Some might call it deprofessionalization? It is not uncommon that advances in technology and economics significantly alter or eliminate occupations. No doubt, many repetitious and physically demanding jobs have been successfully replaced. However, some occupations require a deeper understanding of science and circumstances to evaluate and then perform at the highest level. Basic computer logic of “if this, then this” while performing some tasks may not produce be the “best” results? Ask Captain Sully.

WHO IS YOUR ROLE MODEL AND WHY?

Studs Terkel. He wrote the book “Working” in 1974. The book was one of the reading options in an undergraduate sociology class. It was inspiring and interesting. *Inspiring*, to think of the author entering unknown and uncomfortable worlds, while engaging strangers in conversation about what they did for a living – good – bad – and sometimes illegal. *Interesting*, in realizing the role work plays in the shaping of people’s perception of themselves and others.

The research to write the book was brilliant: just in talking to people about their work and writing it down. I thought, “That’s a cool job.”

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

I guess I’m lucky. I don’t have to balance the two, for me, they’re the same.