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Education history:

BS – Chemistry and Biology, Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, IN

MD – Indiana University School of Medicine, Indianapolis, IN

Anatomic and Clinical Pathology Residency – Wake Forest University School of Medicine, Winston-Salem, NC

Forensic Pathology Fellowship – University of Texas-Southwestern Medical School/Dallas County Medical Examiner’s Office, Dallas, TX

HOW DID YOU INITIALLY BECOME INTERESTED IN FORENSIC PATHOLOGY?

I struggled during 3rd year of medical school regarding my choice of a medical specialty. It wasn't that I couldn't decide between a group of really great options. In fact, I had quickly ruled-out “surgical” and “medical” specialties, and, like most medical schools at that time, exposure to various “non-mainstream” specialties was not promoted much at IUSM. After I settled on pathology as a career choice (which is a story in and of itself), I participated in a 1-month elective in forensic pathology in Indianapolis, early as a 4th year student. Under the tutelage of Drs. John Pless, Mike Clark, and Dean Hawley, I was introduced to the wonderful world of forensic pathology. I was hooked. What a fascinating career choice! I decided that I would try to find a residency program that allowed me as much exposure to forensic pathology as possible.

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?

First, to become the best forensic pathologist that you can be, you must first become the best pathologist that you can be; and, to become the best pathologist that you can be, you should strive to become the best physician that you can be. Second, recognize that not all pathologists (or pathology residency programs) recognize (let alone embrace) autopsy and/or forensic pathology as important aspects of pathology training and/or practice. You will need to be careful to balance your commitment to becoming an excellent pathologist with your enthusiasm for forensic pathology, recognizing that, in certain circumstances or

at certain times, it may not be the best thing for your overall training to be outspoken about your desire to become a forensic pathologist. To a great extent, how this balance works-out for you will depend on how your residency program (and attending pathologists) view forensic pathology. Try to select a pathology residency program that accepts, or better yet embraces, forensic pathology as an important subspecialty of pathology. If possible, select a program that provides (or allows) abundant exposure to forensic pathology during your residency training. There are many available options in this regard. I was fortunate to participate in a 5 year AP/CP residency program where the hospital and ME autopsy services were conjoined and run by Board-Certified Academic Forensic Pathologists. By the time I had completed my residency training, I felt very well-prepared going into my forensic fellowship. Third, if at all possible, students and residents should get involved with professional pathology organizations, including the general ones (like CAP and ASCP) as well as the more specific forensic organizations (AAFS and NAME). If possible, attend the meetings and present papers/posters. It's a great way to "get a feel" for the specialty and to confirm whether or not the specialty is for you. Finally, regarding fellowship programs, it's probably never too early to contact programs that you might be interested in. As you know, certain programs fill years in advance, but it is also noteworthy that, every year, there are open "slots" available for forensic fellows. Every program has something excellent to offer, and I know that each program is staffed by outstanding forensic pathologists. If time and circumstances allow, a prospective forensic pathology fellow should try to make a determination regarding whether they want to train at a large, multi-fellow, busy office where the case volume is high versus a smaller to mid-size office with only a single fellow, where they are not as busy, but fellows may receive a bit more personalized attention. Each of these basic types of programs has its pros and cons.

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

Providing answers to grieving family members/loved ones, as well as others who require answers from us for public health and justice purposes. Ultimately, providing these answers is part and parcel of a more all-encompassing aspect of being a forensic pathologist... that of being a teacher.

WHAT IS THE GREATEST CHALLENGE OF BEING A FORENSIC PATHOLOGIST?

I think the greatest challenge for forensic pathologists mirrors one of the greatest challenges facing society in general. More and more people embrace a worldview that suggests that there is no such thing as an absolute truth. I am by no means suggesting that the answers that we provide in forensic pathology are necessarily "absolute." In fact, many of the findings we report and the opinions we render are merely our best efforts to provide the most likely explanation for a set of facts presented to us. However, in a medical/scientific arena where we strive to find and express the truth, the prevailing non-absolutist mentality that "my opinion is just as legitimate as yours" can sometimes lead to some disheartening, dare I say "unjust," outcomes. This is exemplified in certain legal

“battles.” -- More important and concerning, however, is a corollary to the above worldview statement, which essentially says “what I believe and/or report to be a truth about you is true,” even if there is no evidence to support this so-called truth. Unfortunately, this mentality often results in vicious character assassination. The practice seems to have been perfected by certain members of the media, but unfortunately, sometimes even our own colleagues engage in such activity.

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

In addition to the issues related to “truths” and “untruths” as addressed in the previous question, I believe that the following items represent a list of other very important issues facing forensic pathology today: 1) Workforce shortage issues; 2) Attempts by certain entities (Government or otherwise) to regulate the practice of FP; 3) Lawsuits filed against FPs; 4) Lack of time, resources, workforce to perform FP research.

WHO IS YOUR ROLE MODEL AND WHY?

My father, August Prahlow, who was *not* a pathologist or a physician, but was a parochial school teacher. He was solid in his beliefs, unshakeable, and humble. He led by his actions. He was quiet, gentle, and loving, but stern when he needed to be. He was a beloved teacher and father.

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

While my professional focus is Forensics, my worldview, values, priorities, and free-time can be summarized by several additional “F” words: Faith, Family, and Friends. As a Christian with a Biblical worldview, I strive to live my life according to the values and principles espoused by Jesus Christ, including the very important practice of Forgiveness. Ultimately, it is my Faith that allows me to balance the stresses of work and life. My Family (including my wife, Tamara, our children, and our grandchildren) is another source of strength for me, as are my Friends, both at and outside of the work environment. Favorite hobbies include exercising (I used to say “running,” but now it’s better described as “jogging,” biking, kayaking, walking/hiking), shooting, woodworking, and traveling. Finally, I’ll end with a few more of my favorite “F” words: Fellowship, Fitness, Frisbee, Food, and Field, as in Wrigley Field.