

The POST...A Forensic Publication



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Show me the manner in which a nation or community cares for its dead and I will measure with mathematical exactness the tender sympathies of its people, their respect for the law of the land and their loy-

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President's Message by Scott M. Schmidt, CFSP Chief Coroner—Orleans County, New York

HAPPY NEW YEAR!! I hope that this letter finds you and your family rested up after the Holidays and rejuvenated to make the best out of 2011. This is a new year, change in many areas....it's bound to happen in your lives and my life is no exception.

My oldest daughter Hayley will be graduating from High School next year. As a musician and as President of the Class of 2011 she has had a crash course in change...when it comes to responsibility. She no longer is just a student, but a leader. And as a leader, she needs to set examples. She's had to 'step-up' and emcee events and she's had to push herself even harder in order to meet her academic responsibilities and her Presidential responsibilities. She had to wrangle members of her class BEFORE school started in order to paint the school hallway for a

contest amongst the various Class Years. I'm sure she would agree however, that the most important responsibility that she has undertaken was that of communication. Hayley has had to be in constant communication with not only her fellow class officers, but with the student body, faculty, and District Administrators. Was that intimidating at times, yes. Was that a unique challenge for a 17 year old preparing to go to college, yes. Will that experience and now skill, benefit her as she becomes a member of society and player in the 'real-world', most definitely yes!

We all know the benefits of clear and concise communication. The reason NYSACCME spends the money to produce and mail out this publication twice a year is to communicate with you...the member. While we struggle to

find a consistent, understandable, and reliable newsletter editor/contributor, we're grateful for those who've taken the time to contribute articles in the past so that we can actually go to press. We would relish the opportunity to have one of YOU pick up the newsletter project and run with it. If you like to write, if you have information to share, or if you would just like to treat yourself to this awesome and unique responsibility, I ask you to COMMUNICATE to me or to Susan Ernst your desire to do so.

NYSACCME needs your involvement, your contributions, and your talent. And, just like Hayley, all you have to do is 'step-up' to the challenge! I hope to hear from YOU, in the very near future.



**SPRING 2011 CONFERENCE
THE MANY FACES OF SUICIDE
By Blanche Borzell, MD**



The spring NYSACCME conference will be held in beautiful Watkins Glen on March 19th and 20th, 2011. It is at the Watkins Glen Harbor Hotel, a new hotel at the foot of Seneca Lake. The lineup of speakers is outstanding and includes Dr. Erik Mitchell, the founder of NYSACCME who now hales from Topeka, Kansas. Many different aspects of deaths by suicide will be covered. These include legal questions which may arise, a forensic psychiatrist's lecture on understanding murder-suicides and a talk by a woman whose husband killed himself 4 years ago. The conference will end with a lecture on autoerotics which is sure to hold your attention on Sunday morning.

We have applied for 14 AAFP Prescribed credits and are waiting to hear from that accrediting organization. Incidentally, AAFP

and AMA Prescribed (Class I) credits are equivalent to each other.

Besides a valuable educational experience there will be a few other perks. We are planning a private tour for coroners of the new Finger Lakes Distillery on the east side of Seneca Lake which is just 5 miles from the Watkins Glen Harbor Hotel. Members will receive a 10% discount at the distillery which makes vodkas, brandies, gin and other goodies.

The Famous Brands Outlet Store in Watkins Glen, just a few blocks from the Hotel has agreed to a 10% discount for people attending the NYSACCME conference that weekend. This store sells brand name quality clothing at already discounted prices, including Carhartt, Columbia, Muck Boots, Levi, Woolrich and other well-known brands. Atten-

dees will also receive a 10% discount at the General Store one block away. This is a unique store filled with fun items, sports equipment, homemade fudge and lots of collectibles and will take you a step back in time. Watkins Glen is surrounded by wineries and stunning lake views. It is a small tourist village and you can relax while soaking up a lot of knowledge. You can also relax in the Harbor Hotel's pool. Check out the website to get an idea of what awaits you. Can't wait to see you in Watkins Glen!

NYSACCME MISSION STATEMENT



The Mission and Goals of the NYSACCME are to assist in advancement of Forensic Science and its application to death investigation by providing education to those who interact during a death investigation. We strive for the improvement of quality in death investigations in NY State and the advancement of support by the

State of NY, as well as County and Local governments for the death investigators. By organizing Coroners and Medical Examiners throughout the State, we support promulgation of standards for death investigation. We hope to maintain a greater quality of death investigation by accrediting our membership via training, and we

strive to assist with the writing of new laws and/or changing of old laws by maintaining liaison with legislative bodies, representatives, and the State DOH. We are ACTIVISTS for Forensic Science.



LOOKING TOWARD FALL

Fall in the Catskill's is my favorite season! Warm days & cool nights, leaves starting to turn and NYSACCME Fall 2011 is coming to the Catskill Mountains and the Villa Roma Resort.

We are putting together a selection of interesting speakers for this year's Fall Conference as well as some other offerings that might interest your spouse and family to join in for the weekend.

One of the highlights will be Sullivan County's former District Attorney, Steven Lungen. Steve retired last year after serving as the second longest sitting DA in New York State. Even in a rural county like Sullivan, that makes for some GREAT stories! We have asked Steve to present some of his famous cases and it promises to be interesting! There is much more, and the spring issue of the POST will give up more details.

The Villa Roma Resort is a beautiful hotel nestled in to the Catskill Mountains and definitely off the beaten path. Just a few minutes out of Callicoon, New York, the Villa Roma offers a full range of amenities and events for the whole family. For golfers the Villa Roma boasts a world class 18 holes. Hiking, biking, horseback riding, indoor pool, the Villa Roma has it all. And for the very brave (or foolish) the Villa is only 5 minutes from the Delaware River and some of the best canoeing & rafting in the Northeast. You will not find a better setting for the Fall Season! For more info go to www.villaroma.com and check out everything the Villa has to offer.

The pride of Sullivan County is Bethel Woods Center for the Arts at the site of the 1969 Woodstock Festival. If you were a hippy in an earlier life, this is something you have to see! The Museum at Bethel Woods is the foremost collection and display of Woodstock memorabilia and the music that shaped most of our lives. We are working on a special offer from Bethel Woods for NYSACCME members interested in visiting the site and museum. For a taste of what Bethel Woods is about visit www.bethelwoodscenter.org. It is a special place!

There are many great restaurants in the area for those coming in on Friday evening. We will have more info in the next issue.

Sullivan County prides itself on hospitality and the Villa Roma is one of our best examples. We look forward to seeing you at the Fall Conference. Mike and I are working hard to make this a great experience.

See you then!
Alan Kesten
Michael Speer
Sullivan County Coroners

FORENSIC FICTIONAL LITERATURE

By Mary I. Jumbelic, MD

Forensics has gone through a renaissance in the previous 10 years. Forensic scientists are now well respected. Part of this change has been due to modern authors whose fictional professionals have become very well known. No longing is the sleuthing world left to police and private investigators. The novels written within the past fifteen years have strong protagonists who know how to look at the microscopic slide AND handle a firearm.

Of course there is the pioneer female forensic pathologist, Kay Scarpetta, developed by Patricia Cornwell. Dr. Scarpetta is the brilliant and unstoppable chief medical examiner of Virginia. At a time when very few chief medical examiners were women, Ms. Cornwell chose Kay, inspired by the true life Marcella Fierro, then Chief Medical Examiner of Virginia. Starting with Postmortem in 1990 and continuing to her most recent 18th book in 2010, Post Mortuary, Ms. Cornwell has followed the life of Dr. Scarpetta from her early years to retirement. Dr. Scarpetta has survived ethical questions, professional mistakes, and extreme political strife. Many of the topics that form a background in Ms. Cornwell's stories are very real.

I remember being in the morgue at Northwestern when I first heard about her. I was in the midst of an autopsy when conversation turned to her first novel. My assistant, a long time autopsy tech, said he would lend me her book. I forgot the conversation and only remembered when he brought it in the next day. He

was very insistent that I read it. I was hooked and have gone on to read all but the most recent one. Of course I understood my tech's insistence when I was introduced to Dr. Scarpetta, a fictional character much like myself.

For the past 15 years when I talk to people and they discover my profession, so many have asked, "Oh, do you read Patricia Cornwell?" This strikes up a conversation about truth and fiction within forensics and is a jumping off point to make a connection with someone. I have even been asked that same question by judges in the courtroom while I am waiting to testify as an expert witness. I've certainly been glad to answer "Yes, Your Honor" in those cases. I love her writing but even if I didn't like, I feel a professional obligation to read it. It is important to know what is being written about forensic science even in a fictional world. The average lay person gains their knowledge about forensics from both real live cases and reality TV but also by popular writers. It is best to stay abreast of the fiction to combat misconceptions in our field.

There have been numerous other authors who attempt to write about the professionals in forensic sciences from their own unique perspective. I'm not talking about the innumerable detective or gumshoe novels that have continued to be popular since the 1960s but the actual

forensic experts who write fiction based on their own knowledge. Take Kathy Reichs. She is a world famous forensic anthropologist whose main character in her novels is also a forensic anthropologist. This character is loosely autobiographical and divides her professional time between Canada and North Carolina, as does Dr. Reichs. Her books led to a television series entitled "Bones." She has single-handedly made anthropology well known and well, sexy. So many college students that I have met whether teaching them or directing their internship, have told me they want to be a forensic anthropologist. And this is in a subspecialty that probably has one of the smallest memberships within the American Academy of Forensic Sciences.

Another somewhat obscure author-anthropologist whose protagonist is also an anthropologist is Aaron Elkins. His stories are more Indiana Jones style than laboratory oriented but a good read all the same. Fiction does influence life.

I have discussed this literary phenomenon with my co-workers and other forensic professionals and there is a group who choose purposely to avoid reading any of the aforementioned books. When asked "why", they usually cite the overblown forensic techniques and the lack of realism in the cases or the experts. I have the opposite opinion. Fiction is meant to be fiction. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle gave unearthly powers to Sherlock Holmes, crediting him with

accurate interpretations of a small fleck of dirt or a minor aroma of anyone in his presence. Yet that did not stop thousands and now millions from reading his books. In fact the very keen observations of Holmes endear him to the reader.

There are other forensic protagonists. Author Stephen White, psychologist, has a main character, also a psychologist, who is always working on the "whodunit" from a psychiatric perspective. And then there is Robin Cook, MD, who every few years writes about the medical examiners in the New York City Morgue. Every established medical examiner dreams of writing a novel but few have been successful. Thomas Naguchi wrote Unnatural Causes in 1989, while Michael Baden, wrote Remains Silent in 2005 and Skeleton Justice in 2009. These have been well received confirming the continued desire of the public for all things forensics.

Lastly a worthwhile fictional protagonist to keep an eye on is Lincoln Rhymes, invented by the writer Jeffrey Deaver. This character tests our mettle as he is a wheelchair bound detective who ala Sherlock Holmes, solves crimes by the meticulous examination of evidence. Of course he can't do this alone and has an evidence recovery/detective team that helps do the physical job that his sharp wits command.

All of these fictional people and the real life authors behind them do us justice in keeping the public eye on the fields in forensics. After all, we can certainly do better than these popular novel heroes, can't we?

N.Y.S.A.C.C.M.E.

New York State Association of County Coroners
and Medical Examiners

BUSINESS OFFICES

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We're on the web!!

www.nysaccme.org



SPRING 2011 CONFERENCE— March 18-20, 2011

True or False? Only the wealthy can make a significant gift to NYSACCME.

FALSE! Interestingly, the wealthy are less likely than others to give. Many of our supporters are not wealthy, but are interested in making a sizeable donation to support NYSACCME and its efforts in Medico-Legal Death Investigation Education. But to be practical, they must maintain their current income and cash flow levels. They want to give, but aren't sure how to give wisely. A planned gift to NYSACCME is a wonderful way to make a differ-

ence in the Educational efforts of your organization while also enhancing your own financial and estate plans. Bequests, trusts, gifts of life insurance, and retirement assets—these giving vehicles can benefit you regardless of your level of wealth. And, with a planned gift, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have truly made a difference in the future of Forensic Science. Why not remember NYSACCME in your will or estate planning

or with an outright donation now, to ensure that your interests in NYSACCME will endure through the years. Your attorney and/or financial advisor can help you with the options available to you. NYSACCME is a Not-for-Profit Organization and your gift is tax deductible. Thank you.

