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FORENSIC PATHOLOGY : PIVOT OF MEDICO-LEGAL SYSTEM

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What is Forensic Pathology

- It is considered a subspecialty of forensic medicine in India.
- It is the application of pathology for the purpose of law and administration of justice.
- It focuses on determining the cause of death by examining a dead body.
- The methodology may vary depending upon the country of origin but the basic science and the aim remains the same.

Sir Conrad Spilsbury : The Father of Modern Forensic Pathology



- In India it constitutes of two intermingled specialties of medical science:
 1. Forensic medicine
 2. Pathology
- Forensic medicine in India is relatively a younger branch which is slowly but surely gaining importance.

Who is a Forensic Pathologist?

- Forensic pathologists are trained professionals. The role of a forensic pathologist is to establish the cause of death in the deceased.
- In India Forensic Medicine is a separate specialty and deal with such cases.

What do they do?

- The work of a Forensic pathologist includes determining all the aspects associated with a sudden death including:
 - Cause of death
 - Mode of death
 - Manner of death
- Examines and documents wounds and injuries, both at autopsy and occasionally in a clinical setting.
- Other responsibilities also include giving opinion regarding age, injury, sex and potency etc.

How do they do it

- A pathologist examines the dead body, documents the facts and collect required samples which can aid in leading to a cause of death. They study and analyze physical evidence.
- It can also include a visit to the scene of crime which is done under medical examiner system as practiced in USA and is the best form of inquest.
- Serves as an expert witness in courts of law testifying in civil or criminal cases.

Why do they do it

- A medico-legal autopsy is done on inquest which means ‘ an enquiry into the cause of death’
- In India PME inquest is of 2 types:
 - Police Inquest: held U/S 174 CrPC
 - Magistrate Inquest: held U/S 176 CrPC

Duties of a Forensic Pathologist?

- To help the investigating agencies to determine the cause and manner of death.
- To collect samples and perform toxicological, microscopic, photographic, radiological, serologic and microbiological studies to reach to conclusion.
- Sometimes travel to the scene of the crime to collect evidence and scene reconstruction.

- A forensic expert must also have working knowledge of several other non-medical sciences, this includes being able to apply areas of toxicology, firearms examination, trace evidence, forensic serology and DNA technology to their investigation into the death of the person involved.

Indian Medico-legal system

- Indian medico-legal system has flaws in its basic design:-
 - ***Lack of any centralized guidelines***: there are no set procedures of medico-legal work which often leads to confusion among agencies.
 - ***Lack of properly trained experts***: there is an acute shortage of trained individuals in the field of Forensic medicine.

- ***Slow justice delivery***: Indian judicial system is understaffed and overburdened due to which timely justice is often not served.
- ***Illegal medical practitioners***: they give rise to unnecessary medical litigations and straining the already overburdened system
- ***Neglect on the part of policy making agencies***: countrywide there is still a picture of neglect towards this aspect.

Why is Forensic Pathology so important now?

- In recent years due to increased public awareness and an aggressive media, forensic pathology has awakened keen interest among the masses.
- Now autopsy cases and medico-legal litigations have increased many folds in last few years.
- Now in the face of this trend the need for well trained forensic pathologist is felt more than ever.

- In recent years forensic pathology has become more and more important because the judicial and the courts systems are relying more and more on the evidence and the conclusions forensic pathologists come up with in murder or suicide cases. This has led to a boom in the amount of courses available in the study of forensic science and analysis.

- Forensic pathology is also very important in finding cures and vaccines for many diseases by finding out exactly how the infected person may have died, this is done by the examination of the body at autopsy, of tissues removed during surgery, and by analysis of fluids from the body, such as blood or urine, in the clinical pathology laboratory . Determining the exact cause of death is the first step to finding a cure.

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