



## Pathology & Biology Section – 2004

---

### G54 Boating People Pathology

*Francesco Introna, MD\*, Alberto Tortorella, MD, Roberto Vaglio, MD, and Antonio De Donno, MD, Sezione di Medicina Legale-DIMIMP, P.zza Giulio Cesare, 11, Bari, 70100, Italy*

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by describing unusual injuries and manner of death in forensic pathology about boating people.

The Authors describes the autopsy findings observed in foreign people died during the attempts of crossing the Adriatic sea to get Italy illegally. The crossings usually took place at night on board a rubber dinghy (8-10 mt long) with powerful outboard engines, driven by affiliate of criminal organization, full up to 40 illegal immigrants.

In the last five years we performed autopsy 57 bodies victims of these accidents.

The autopsy performed on corpses showed two kinds of injuries: some victims ha extensive amputations, produced by violent impact during collision between boats or caused by outboard-motor propeller on victims falling overboard; some others non injuries at all. Survivors, providing information about boating, told that someone of them, before to fall in water, already lost consciousness. In these cases we find blunt injuries on the head associated with focal or multifocal subarachnoid haemorrhages, consistent with trauma to the head. Although the above findings the cause of death in those victims was determined as drowning based on additional evidence (lungs large and bulky, white foam from trachea and bronchi, water in stomach, swollen brain and chemical finds of drowning in sea-water).

These findings are unusual in forensic pathology. The Authors were supposed that subarachnoid haemorrhages, following of trauma to the head, were responsible of lost consciousness and then made easier drowning when people fell in water-sea.

We found often traumatic head injuries made in people boating on rubber dinghy drived speedy and forced to make abrupt maneuvers to escape the guard boats; these injuries were produced accidentally against stiff parts of the boat (many people boating lying or with head rested on the side) or intentionally by others on the ship.

Sometimes victims presented wounds, localized especially on trunk and lower limbs, chemical burns, produced on the skin by oil flowing from breaking. The water-sea, in fact, compromise permeability of skin, allowing contact of derma with oil, so that it produced injuries seem to burns.

The cause and manner of these uncommon deaths and injuries will be also discussed.

### **Boating People, Subarachnoid Haemorrhages, Chemical Burns**