



## Pathology & Biology Section – 2005

### G22 Forensic Medicine in France

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the organization of forensic medicine in France and the interest in clinical forensic medicine.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by highlighting new fields for forensic doctors.

**Medicolegal activity:** Few teams perform the whole scope of medicolegal activity: “classical” forensic pathology, but also “clinical forensic medicine.” These teams are based in CHUs (Centre Hospitalier Universitaire, or university hospitals, of which there are 25 in France) where usually forensic toxicology from biological samples, DNA, physical anthropology, and forensic histology are also available. Entomology and diatom identification are only done in one center for each. Several of these teams are also in charge of medical care to detainees.

Around 7,000 forensic autopsies are performed yearly for a population of more than 60 million people. This low level of autopsy performance is not only due to a low crime rate, but also to French judicial particularities. Only in four cities is more than one autopsy performed every working day.

When possible, a forensic doctor will be called to the death scene; 14,000 to 25,000 scene examinations per year in France seems a reasonable hypothesis.

Clinical Forensic Medicine includes the examination of people in custody (around 250,000 per year nationally) and also of living victims: child abuse, battered women, assaults, and rapes cases. It is estimated that 45,000 living victims are examined each year by forensic physicians.

**Forensic Doctors:** Two hundred fifty physicians are employed full time in forensic medicine throughout the country. As a result of this limited number, only in some university hospitals will it be possible to have a forensic doctor on duty around the clock every day of the year, for all the types of clinical forensic activities mentioned above. In smaller cities and rural areas, forensic doctors will focus on serious penal case such as rape, homicide, and child abuse, the rest being done by general practitioners.

A majority of forensic doctors are now trained through a national diploma called “**Capacité des Pratiques Medico-Judiciaires**.” The diploma requires that during 2 years, the students will have 30 days practical instruction per year in an accredited hospital unit. The other possibility is **D.E.S.C.** (Complementary Specialized Study Diploma) reserved to the medical interns; after 4 years of internship in any speciality, the candidate becoming a forensic medicine specialist will need 2 more years of practical and full time training in a medical forensic unit plus 200 hours of lectures. The graduate will be able to perform all types of forensic medicine activities (including autopsies).

A recent survey showed that around 750 forensic doctors were needed to provide the appropriate and basic emergency forensic medicine services (clinical and crime scene examination) to each local judicial court.

**Teaching and Research:** INSERM (National Institute of Medical Research) has no forensic medicine section (nor a forensic science section) and there is no PhD program in forensic medicine.

State funded research programs in forensic medicine are limited to scattered projects (fewer than 10 so far). During the medical curriculum of general practitioners, between 20 to 40 hours of lectures will be dedicated to forensic medicine (medical certificates about living victims and death certificates, principles of medical liability, and medical confidentiality).

**Conclusion:** The role of forensic medicine in France is increasing as the forensic doctors are turning to “Violence Medicine” specialists. The relative importance of autopsies is decreasing, a rather positive point with regard to the (worldwide) difficulties for funding this activity, but has an adverse effect on the experience of practitioners. Concentrating forensic autopsies in regional hospital-based centers seems to be the only solution, for the sake of quality.

**Forensic Medicine, France, Organization**