



### D58 Intimate Femicide, Accident or Natural Death

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the importance of keeping an open mind when investigating sudden and unexpected deaths of women in the presence of their intimate partners will be discussed.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by demonstrating how a detailed case investigation and appreciation of the pathological evidence of disease processes can prevent a miscarriage of justice.

This investigation was initiated by a call to 911 at 5:24 am from a resident living in an upscale cottage community in Ontario. The residence was well known to police due to frequent complaints from the neighbors about the dogs barking.

A male reported finding his wife lying unresponsive on the living room floor. Emergency personal arrived on the scene to find the house in disarray. A woman was lying face down on the floor in front of the fireplace. The embers of the fireplace were noted to be red and hot. The paramedics turned her over, assessed her to be vital signs absent and did not initiate resuscitation. Other findings included a body warm to the touch, cool extremities, dilated pupils, mild rigor, facial cyanosis, and no lividity. The woman's body was clad in a plain nightgown, which was soiled and filthy. It was stained with urine and feces. Her feet were covered in dirt and the top of her right toe was cut. There was dried blood noted on the toes on her right foot. The coroner and police responded. Given the nature of the scene the coroner requested additional investigation.

Ten years ago in Ontario, the death of a woman, originally classified as accidental, was determined to be a homicide by her spouse who staged a motor vehicle incident. As a result, all coroners were reminded of the importance of comprehensive investigations of unexpected female deaths where the only witness is a male partner. Subsequently, it also became a policy that all postmortems in cases of sudden and unexpected deaths of women in the presence of an intimate partner be conducted by a Regional Coroner's Pathologist, (a special designation by the Office of the Chief Coroner).

In compliance with this policy, the body of the deceased in this case was transferred to the Forensic Pathology Unit of the Office of the Chief Coroner in Toronto. A significant finding at autopsy was 2800 cc of fluid blood present in the peritoneal cavity.

Additional investigation revealed the following information. The deceased was 52-years-of age. Her husband was twenty years older. When questioned by police, he admitted to having had a "misunderstanding" with her the day prior to her death, but denied any violence. The couple was known to be in financial difficulty. The deceased was recently charged with fraud. The husband told police they had a million dollar home elsewhere, but the deceased refused to sell it as her child lived there.

According to the husband, the couple was up until about 3:00 am. Prior to going to bed, his wife asked for assistance in getting to the bathroom. He claimed that he could not lift her, and she could not walk, so she crawled. He last saw her in the bathroom and he went off to bed. One of the dogs woke him up at 5:00 am. He let the dog out and then went to check on his wife, expecting to find her sleeping on the couch. She was lying on the floor face down and he could not wake her. He then called 911.

Positive autopsy findings included peripheral wasting, a protuberant abdomen and slightly yellow sclera. There was a small amount of dried blood on the left nostril and a 2 cm ill-defined purple-red contusion on her chin. A 3 x 0.5 cm recent abrasion/contusion was noted over the right mastoid process and there were multiple red-purple contusions over the anterior surfaces of the shins. Fading purple contusions were noted over the arms. Fluid blood (2800 cc) was found in the peritoneal cavity.

Was this a death from natural causes, an accident, or foul play? The source of the hemoperitoneum will be revealed during the presentation.

### Femicide, Investigation, Hemoperitoneum