



E7 The Birth of a National Department for Legal Medicine in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg

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After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand the immediate and gradual challenges encountered by health professionals within the framework of the establishment of a national department for legal medicine.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing insight on the challenges of the creation of a new department of legal medicine.

As a result of its geographical location nearly at the heart of the European Union, with a parliamentary democracy implemental form of government, a population of nearly 550,000 and a surface of 2,586 km², a moderate occurrence of violent crime, and a relatively low rate of autopsies, the government of the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg was, in the past, able to outsource its medicolegal services to neighboring countries. In a majority of cases, these services were provided by a legal medicine institute in Germany close to Luxemburg's borders.

In the past, whenever a case arose which required a medicolegal investigation, a German institute was contracted (among others, the Homburg University Hospital, in the proximity of Ramstein/Landstuhl), which then dispatched a forensic pathologist to Luxemburg; however, given the increasing number of cases and the need to increase efficiency, the government of the Grand Duchy decided in 2012 to establish its own legal medicine institute in its own country. This newly created Department for Legal Medicine was thus able to start work in the brand new building of the Laboratoire National de Santé (LNS) in Dudelange (near the French border). Two forensic pathologists working at the institute started on April 1, 2014.

The forensic and clinical toxicology department of the LNS, founded in the 1980s, was also incorporated into the same institute in April 2014. The laboratory's department for forensic genetic identification, which is currently located in Luxemburg city, is scheduled to take up residence in the same building as the Legal Medicine and the Toxicology Departments in 2016.

In addition to geographical difficulties, legal issues had and still have to be resolved (for instance, the necessary revision of laws regarding the statute and transportation of a human corpse, etc.)

In Anglo-Saxon law, a coroner is an investigating agent and is assigned the task of determining the identity of the deceased as well as the cause of death in cases in which the cause of death is questionable or not natural; however, in most European countries, including Luxemburg, the profession of coroner does not exist. In fact, as a rule in Europe, a medical practitioner is called after the discovery of a corpse to proceed with an external postmortem examination onsite and complete a death certificate which states, among other facts, the identity, the manner, the cause, the time, and the location of death. If this medical practitioner's examination shows that the manner of death is or may be unexplained or unnatural, the medical practitioner is obligated to inform the police and the public prosecutor's office in order to open an official investigation/inquest. Thereafter, the deceased undergoes an external and internal postmortem examination. This examination is handled by specially trained medical practitioners, who are equivalent to American forensic pathologists.

Birth of Department, Legal Medicine, Coroner