



THE PERSPECTIVE OF A PATHOLOGIST ASSISTANT GRADUATE STUDENT IN A FORENSIC SETTING



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Most kids growing up watch television shows on cable tv that fit their age demographic, like SpongeBob or Rugrats. However, growing up, one of my favorite tv shows in addition to the “classics” was surprisingly “Dr. G Medical Examiner.” While I didn’t know it at the time, this was my first introduction to the field of pathology, which would later be my career choice and passion.

When I first started my forensic autopsy rotation at the Montgomery County Coroner’s Office, I came with limited background in forensics. Most Pathologist Assistant programs, including Drexel which I currently attend, gear their classes for training in Surgical and Anatomical Pathology. Prior to starting, I didn’t think my training in Surg-Path would prepare me for this rotation, however, I was surprised to see the connection between the two divisions of Pathology.

This rotation so far has given me a lot of understanding into this field. The first being is that as a young PA in training, I get to grossly observe “normal” tissue for the first time in a clinical setting. Up until this point, and especially learning this past year via online instruction, viewing normal tissue has come either pictures in lectures or in our cadaver lab. Now, most cases that I have been a part of so far have allowed me to see normal anatomic relations between organ to organ and have also provided me the opportunity to dissect these tissues without the use of formalin. This has allowed me to appreciate the intricacies of the human body, which will help me in my career both now and in the future.

Another important aspect I’ve learned in this rotation is the connection between forensics and the field of pathology itself. While most people, including myself, view forensics as more of a “who done it” type of science, I have been surprised to see how much actual pathologic findings play a



part in a person's demise. One such case was a female who passed away around the age of forty with little to no medical history, other than a recent brief hospital visit of an infection of the lower extremity. Starting this case, all of us suspected it was a drug overdose, since the infection looked healed, and she was on the correct course of treatment. However, as we were progressing in the autopsy, her cause of death surprised us all. As we were dissecting the lungs, we were able to see a "beautiful" saddle embolus, which in turn gave us her cause of death. This case will always be in my memory since it was the first case where pathology, directly played a role in a patient's death. It was also the first case where I got to see and feel my first pulmonary emboli, which is a frequent cause of death for specific demographics. This case, along with the many others I've seen, has made me appreciate not only the vastness in the field of pathology, but how the many sub-specialties, including forensics, have between one another.

Reflecting on what I have seen so far in this rotation, I believe that forensics has played an important role on the shaping of my career as a Pathologist Assistant. By being able to see normal tissue, and by understanding how vast and important this field is, I believe that my experiences, both here and beyond, will help me provide the best patient care and outcome for both the living...and the deceased. Looking back at the "weird" kid who was fascinated (and not grossed out) by the human body to where I am now, I believe that this career is the right field for me. I am truly grateful to have been given this opportunity at MCCO and I hope to share these experiences, and these stories accumulated here, for many years to come.