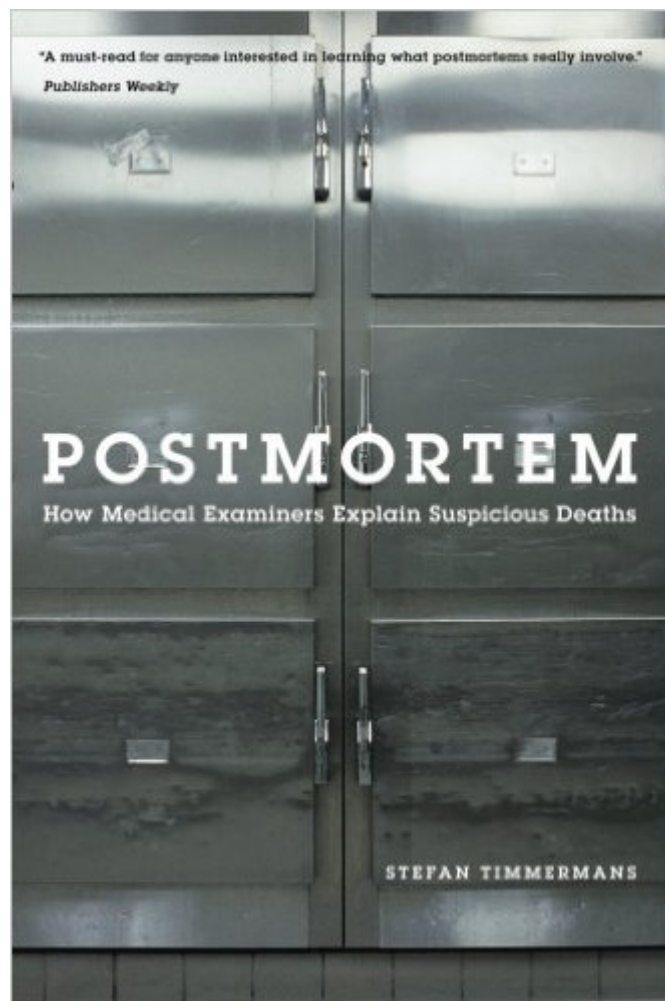


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# Postmortem: How Medical Examiners Explain Suspicious Deaths (Fieldwork Encounters And Discoveries)



## Synopsis

As elected coroners were replaced by medical examiners with scientific training, the American public became fascinated with their work. From the grisly investigations showcased on highly rated television shows like CSI to the bestselling mysteries that revolve around forensic science, medical examiners have never been so visible or compelling. They, and they alone, solve the riddle of suspicious death and the existential questions that come with it. Why did someone die? Could it have been prevented? Should someone be held accountable? What are the implications of ruling a death a suicide, a homicide, or an accident? Can medical examiners unmask the perfect crime? *Postmortem* goes deep inside the world of medical examiners to uncover the intricate web of social, legal, and moral issues in which they operate. Stefan Timmermans spent years in a medical examiner's office following cases, interviewing examiners, and watching autopsies. While he relates fascinating cases here, he is also more broadly interested in the cultural authority and responsibilities that come with being a medical examiner. How medical examiners speak to the living on behalf of the dead is Timmermans's subject, revealed here in the day-to-day lives of the examiners themselves. *Postmortem* is a wake-up call to forensic pathology. . . . This book should be viewed as provocative, rather than threatening, and should be a stimulus for important discussions and action by the forensic pathology community. *Journal of the American Medical Association*

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a superb book that examines the profession of medical examiners from a sociological perspective. The author spent several years observing the practices and methods of one (anonymous) urban medical examiner's office close-up, standing in at autopsies and conducting many interviews with all levels of staff. The book looks at several topics in detail: coronary artery disease; shaken baby syndrome in the "Nanny Trial"; suicide; and organ and tissue donation. (I'm probably leaving something out here.) The introduction is a tad jargony if you are not a sociologist or academic, but very interesting nonetheless. The author explains the difference between medical examiners (physicians) and coroners, who do not need any medical experience, are usually elected, and conduct public inquests. Much of the book looks at differences between various professions and explains why they may be competing with each other for authority and professional recognition. For example, forensic pathologists do not have the same goals as public health officials, as seen in the cases of coronary artery disease and suicide. Pathologists (looking at dead bodies) may come in conflict with clinicians (looking at the live patient), as seen in the case of shaken baby syndrome at criminal trials. The goals of pathologists are often at odds with those of organ and tissue donation advocates; the pathologist may need to do an exceptionally thorough autopsy in the case of a suspicious death or a homicide, while the organ donor advocate may insist that a patient in need of a liver should ethically take priority over the non-existent needs of a dead body. The endnotes and bibliography are extensive and well worth reading.

As a practicing forensic pathologist, I will recommend this book to anybody interested in the topic, specially my colleagues in this line of work. The questions and arguments expressed in it are worth considering everytime we make a decision as to cause of death and specially on something so subjective as manner of death. This book is an open invitation to reflect on topics that we take for granted. Pedro M. Ortiz Colom MD

I highly recommend this book, but only to those people who are medicolegal death investigators. It is a unique look at our profession from a social sciences standpoint. It is not an easy read but it definately changed my perspective.

Postmortem: How Medical Examiners Explain Suspicious Deaths offers what few competitors can: a close-up look into just how medical examiners work. The author spent three years shadowing examiners to understand how they probe questionable deaths, and Postmortem covers not just the

physical but the legal, social and moral issues faced by the industry. From issues of objectivity in the face of subjective evidence to influences in headline cases, Postmortem is a title not just for the general public, but especially for the college- level medical collection.

I actually work for the ME office and wanted to know what others that do this job, think about the job etc.....The chapter on donors was very good. Lots of issues have risen with the almost FORCED DONATION people have to face. I am glad some of that was brought up. Interesting to hear how all of the donation legislation is passed with very little input from the people on the front lines of this. ME/nurses/doctors. I know a lot of nurses who have removed donor from their drivers license because of the aggressive approach by the donation group. They will have it addressed in a living will. And let the family decide. The choice is taken totally out of the legal NOK's hands once DONOR is on your DL. They, the donor organization don't even have to tell family before they procede with organ donation. They may be non profit but they make a lot of money doing this. I think more light should be put on this legislation before it is passed. I too forget about the deceased as soon as my investigation is done. Its the only way to keep doing this job, and I was glad to hear that is how others cope too. Sympathy but not empathy.....or you will never get through the day.....and it drives me nuts when I am constantly asked how I do it, blah blah, you either can or you can't.....I usually just tell people I work for the "county" when I am asked what I do for a living.....Not easy reading book and not for everyone..... but well worth it

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