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Interview with Karen J. Griest, M.D.

Karen J. Griest, M.D.

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Dr. Karen Griest graduated from Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio having majored in genetics. Following graduation, she worked for the Ohio State Microbiology Department on the campus of Ohio State University. She moved to Colorado where she worked in human cytogenetic research, Department of Biophysics and Genetics, at the University of Colorado Medical Center in Denver, Colorado. During that time she worked on the umbilical cord detection technique to screen for infants with the double-Y chromosome. She received her M.D. from the State University at Liege, Belgium. During her studies in Liege, she worked for the Red Cross Transfusion Center Mobile Donor Unit and the University Department of Microbiology and Parasitology. Following graduation from medical school, she studied surgery for one year at Good Samaritan Hospital in Cincinnati, Ohio and completed a residency in anatomical pathology at the University of Cincinnati Medical Center, Cincinnati, Ohio. These were followed by a Fellowship in Forensic Pathology at the Hamilton

County Institute of Forensic Medicine, Toxicology and Criminalistics in Cincinnati, Ohio. A second Fellowship in Pediatric Clinical and Research Pathology was completed at The Children's Hospital in Denver, Colorado. She was employed by the Office of the Medical Investigator (the Medical Examiner's Office) in New Mexico and a member of the faculty of the New Mexico School of Medicine, Department of Pathology for two years before establishing the Center for Medicolegal Research and Consultation in order to concentrate predominantly on pediatric forensic cases.

Dr. Griest is the editor and major contributor to The Pediatric Trauma and Forensic Newsletter, established in 1993. In addition, to forensic teaching while employed at the Office of the Medical Investigator of New Mexico, she continued to teach forensic medical investigation to police officers and other criminal investigators, as well as pediatricians, attorneys, forensic nurses, forensic pathologist, and other forensic investigators. She is the author of articles on forensic pediatric issues as well as other forensic pathology related topics. She is the editor and a contributing author of the book *Pediatric Homicide: Medical Investigation*.

Dr. Griest is a member of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, the National Association of Medical Examiners, the Children's Division of the American Humane Association, the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, and the American College of Forensic Examiners.

Dr. Griest has consulted on hundreds of child injury and death cases. She has testified in state and federal courts around the United States.

***Pediatric Homicide: Medical Investigation*, the best selling book by Griest. Click cover to read its reviev**

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We at the "*Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology*" approached her for an online interview and she graciously agreed. The interview was conducted by the editor-in-chief Dr. Anil Aggrawal. Some excerpts....)

Q. Why is Pediatric homicide so important for forensic pathologists?



A. Children differ from adults anatomically, physiologically, and metabolically. And, all of these factors are changing as the child grows. How a child reacts to injury and disease is different in children compared to adults and different in infants versus older children.

In addition, homicidal deaths in children can have very subtle physical findings, or none at all. Add to this that natural deaths in infants and children can also have subtle findings and that natural deaths in children can be mistaken for homicidal deaths, it becomes evident that a text that outlines the scientific basis for a diagnosis of homicide in children would be useful.

Q. Do you think, we should have a specialized course for such kind of study?



A. There are courses on child abuse. And, the causes of violent as well as sudden unexpected death in children is part of the training of Pathologist in Forensic Fellowships. Natural causes of children's disease and death are taught in Pediatric and Pediatric Pathology Fellowships. A Forensic Pathologist working with a Pediatric Pathologist would be the ideal situation.

There are a few doctors in the United States that have studied both Forensic and Pediatric Pathology or Pediatrics. I was very lucky, in addition to a Forensic Fellowship, to complete a Pediatric Pathology Fellowship where the head of the Department also had training in Forensic Pathology. Thank you Dr. Beckwith.

Q. How did you get interested in this field?

A.  I studied genetics at Ohio State University followed by work on a research project at the University of Colorado where my job took me into the Genetics Clinics. The cases, of course, were very interesting, but the families of these children were amazing. Their love and care of these children, in spite of all the difficulties and poor prognoses was heroic. It deepened my interest in the problems of children.

Karen J. Griest, M.D.
(Click picture to enlarge)



My interest in Forensics stems from the love of logic and problem solving I've had since childhood. By the time I was 12 I had read the Sherlock Holmes books many times.

Q. So you have read all Sherlock Holmes stories. Which three of them would you rate in best?

A.  They are all equally good. But, one of my favorites is "The Dancing Men".

Q. What is your basic field of specialization?

A.  My basic fields of specialization are Forensic Pathology and Forensic Pediatric Pathology.

Q. How did you conceive the idea of writing this book? How much time did you take to complete it?

A.  The knowledge and training in children's issues in forensic offices is inconsistent, within offices and between offices. I have known that there was a need for such a book for many years. I finally had the time to write it last year. It took the entire year to write with the help of my friends, my co-authors.

Q. Is consultation the only activity of your organization?

A.  No, the Center for Medicolegal Research and Consultation, also publishes the Pediatric Trauma and Forensic Newsletter which reviews recently published medical and forensic literature involving injury and death of children. The Center also has been involved in teaching forensics and in forensic research, especially on active cases.

Q. Any fascinating experiences while writing this book, or while researching for this book?

A.  The book is predominantly based on the medical literature. The photos and organization are based on experience, what is important and what are the issues in the diagnoses of pediatric deaths.

Q. What is your main profession?

A.  I am a Forensic Pathologist and Pediatric Forensic Pathologist.

Q. Could you tell us about your family? Did you inherit the love of science/writing from your parents? How many children do you have? Would you be happy if they took up the (subject of your book) as a profession? What are they doing now anyway?

A.  I have no children but lots of family.

Karen J. Griest, M.D.
(Click picture to enlarge)



Q. Tell us something about your background. What do you hope to accomplish with your current book?



A. My professional background is outlined in my bio. I hope the book helps professionals in forensics by providing a science based source of information on deaths in children and infants.

Q. What do you love most (besides your professional work and writing of course)?



A. My interests include gardening and meditation. Both are good for body and mind.

Q. Your favorite dish, book, movie, star, person?

A.  My favorite movie is "*Paper Chase*". I have lots of favorite dishes, books. and people.

Q. What do you dislike most?

A.  Nothing.

Q. What do you consider as your biggest achievement in life?

A.  It is still to come.

Q. If God asked you choose your profession again, what would it be and why?

A.  I think things happened as they were supposed to, although I still have a great interest in Clinical Genetics and would have been happy in that profession.

Q. When were you born? How were you attracted to pediatric homicide? Any interesting experiences?


A. I got interested in pediatric homicide through my training in genetics and forensic pathology. I have many interesting experiences. I have a very interesting job. There are too many interesting stories to include here. Perhaps I will include them in future publications.

Q. Any message for our readers?


A. I wouldn't presume to give advice to other professionals. To students I would say make a profession of what interests you.


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Interviews : Collective Index

Interviews in our sister publication : Collective Index

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