

From: Professor Ashley Dennison
President Leicestershire Medico-Legal Society

Dear Member or Friend of the Society,

I am honoured to have been elected President of the Leicestershire Medico-Legal Society following the extremely successful term of Dan O’Keeffe. This letter is addressed to all those who have provided postal addresses, however some names and addresses are clearly out of date. It will also be sent out by group email, and it would be helpful if those who receive an email but not a postal version could provide their postal addresses to Christl Hughes at lmedicoleg6@aol.com.

Times are challenging for both professions and wide-ranging changes and high-profile cases, resulting in sometimes controversial prison sentences, Brexit and COVID have emphasised the increasing importance of the longstanding relationship. The value of the relationship between the two professions has of course been recognised in Western societies for over a century and explains not only the thriving groups in the majority of the UK’s cities but around the world including Japan, Australia, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Canada, and the USA.



*Presently displayed in the Louvre, Paris.
Below the relief are about 4,130 lines of
cuneiform text*

It is believed however that the earliest clear reference to medico-legal matters was recorded in the *Code of Hammurabi* almost four thousand years ago. It is a Babylonian legal text written from 1755-1750 BC in Old Babylonian and it is thought to have been written by Hammurabi the 6th king of the First Dynasty of Babylon. It includes legislation relating to the practice of medicine and covers the topic of medical malpractice, setting out for the first time the concept of civil and criminal liability for improper and negligent medical care. Penalties ranged from monetary compensation to cutting off the surgeon’s hand and fees were fixed.

In Europe the Justinian Code was emerged in Rome between 529 and 564 A.D., The Code addressed a number of medicolegal issues including the concept of a conflict of interest and states that *“A medical expert would not be used to proper or greatest advantage if he were to be simply regarded as an ordinary witness, appearing for one side or the other.”*

Legal medicine began to be promoted within formal educational circles in the sixteen hundreds and in Germany in 1650 Michaelis lectured on legal medicine. By 1720, professorships concerning the subject were founded by the state and Germany established the first recognised medicolegal clinic in Vienna in 1830 with a second one in Berlin three years later. In 1803 France decreed that judges could only appoint medical experts if they

were medical graduates and also that they must have taken a course and passed an examination in legal medicine. Like Germany, France established its first professional Chair in Legal Medicine in 1794 and its first recognised medico-legal clinic in 1840. In 1803 Great Britain established its first Chair of Forensic Medicine at the University of Edinburgh and within 80 years all medical schools had followed suite.

In the USA early medico-legal studies simply consisted of the voluntary attendance at lectures pertaining to the inter-relationship of medicine, the law and the courts. Formal medico-legal studies were first offered at Harvard as part of the regular curriculum in 1815 incorporated in conjunction with obstetrics. Walter Channing occupied the chair of Obstetrics and Medical Jurisprudence from 1818 and was succeeded by David Humphreys Storer from 1854 to 1868. In 1907 George Burgess Magrath became the Medical Examiner for Suffolk County and wrote to the Medical School's Dean, Edward H. Bradford Magrath in 1919;

"I am eager to make the presentation of this subject in the Harvard University Medical School the best thing of its kind in this country. My official work not only endows me with rich opportunity, but likewise through the contact with the body politic of physicians incidental to it, convinces me of the stirring need of its wider use for educational purposes. Again, I have no need to comment with you on the low status of medical jurisprudence in this country, and on the meagreness of the instruction therein offered by our medical schools. This community is one of the very few in which scientific medicine is officially applied to the use of the law, and it ought to be the one in which the principal institution of medical research and instruction transcends all others in the field of medical knowledge."

Magrath offered a course in *legal medicine* for second-year medical students which included attendance at post-mortems at Boston's North District Morgue and Massachusetts General Hospital. Although initially received enthusiastically within just 10 years legal medicine had been reduced to a few lectures appended to the pathology course.



*Alfred Swaine Taylor (1806-1880)
Medical Jurisprudence
5th American from the 7th and improved
London edition, with additions by
Edward Hartshorne
(Philadelphia: Blanchard & Lea, 1861)
Gift of Harvard Medical School to the
Boston Medical Library, 1885
The page displayed concerns the insanity
plea and the McNaughten rule.*

Taylor's *Medical Jurisprudence* was first printed in London in 1844 and became the standard manual for the study of legal medicine and an American edition followed a year later. At least

twelve editions followed during the 19th century, with revisions and new editions published through the 20th century. In his introduction to this revision, Taylor states, *“Since its first appearance in the year 1844, there have issued from the press fifteen thousand seven hundred and fifty copies. I regard this as a satisfactory proof of its practical utility to those members of the Medical and Legal professions for whose assistance it has been especially intended.”*

There has been considerable progress in the study of and approach to medico- legal matters since the work of the early pioneers and although thankfully surgeons no longer get their hands cut off there are a number of difficult issues which need to be considered when practicing either profession and myriad others looming on the horizon. This year we have invited speakers to address a number of the contemporary issues affecting both professions.

1. An informed consent update with special reference to at risk and complex needs groups: Professor John Mayberry University of Leicester
2. New drug development. Approaches to reduce the need for live animal experimentation and reduce the “bench to bedside time”: Professor Duncan Richards University of Oxford
3. Bailey and Love. The history of an iconic textbook and how to write one (including approaches to plagiarism and unlicensed electronic theft): Miranda Bromage, Publisher Taylor & Francis
4. The impact of Brexit on medical research in the UK: Speaker from The Sanger Institute

Dates for the above Events will be announced shortly.

There was much debate amongst the committee members about the best format for the lectures. Previously there have been a mixture of live and online presentations but there have clearly been dramatic changes over the last 3 years consequent upon the COVID pandemic. To ensure that these important topics reach the widest audience that they deserve they will all be online. However, in the interests of preserving the ethos of this society we intend that there will be some live meetings in future, enabling members of our two professions to mingle and share the social and collegiate interaction that has been the hallmark of our past gatherings.

I do hope you will continue to support the society and help us further expand our membership and if you are a regular attender, please help by paying your membership subscription. We remain keen to reach as many people as possible and would be grateful if you could assist us in this by passing the details on to friends and colleagues.

Up-to-date information on the society can be obtained from our website, <http://lmls.org.uk> is a modest site and is unlikely to be the first site listed by any search engine and it may be necessary to enter the full web address.

Yours sincerely
Ashley Dennison

