

Gregory J. Davis, MD



Current position:

Professor of Pathology & Lab Medicine, University of Kentucky,
Director of the Forensic Consultation Service

Education history:

Undergraduate Education: University of Kentucky

Medical School: University of Tennessee

Residency Program: University of Louisville Affiliated Hospitals

Fellowship: Office of the Chief Medical Examiner,
Commonwealth of Kentucky

HOW DID YOU INITIALLY BECOME INTERESTED IN FORENSIC PATHOLOGY?

Primarily due to the influence of Dr. George Nichols, Chief ME of Kentucky, while I was an anatomic and clinical pathology resident, as well as Dr. L.C. McCloud, another Kentucky ME. They were both outstanding teachers in wildly different ways.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR ASPIRING FORENSIC PATHOLOGISTS, INCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS TO MATCH INTO A PATHOLOGY RESIDENCY PROGRAM AND ACCEPTANCE INTO A FORENSIC PATHOLOGY FELLOWSHIP?

Major in anything you want for undergrad, as long as you get your pre-requisites for med school. Take as many humanities classes as possible: the last thing we need in medicine is a one-note specialist who can only relate to their job. Your major doesn't matter (mine was English), just try to remember to enjoy yourself along the way. Volunteer where needed, not just to put something on a CV, but to add to your life. As much as possible, given that so many of us are a tad introverted, be a people person, meeting and talking with as many MEs, death investigators, and others who can give you insight. In med school, take pathology electives as soon as possible in 4th year and chat folks up.

WHAT IS THE MOST REWARDING ASPECT OF BEING A FORENSIC PATHOLOGIST?

Far and away: the people I get to meet grace of our profession. Other pathologists and other physicians, family members, prosecutors and defense attorneys, civil attorneys, news media, students, residents, and fellows. If one thing has kept the burnout monster at bay, it's the amazing people I get to work with, directly and indirectly. One of the more profound rewards is thinking of my former residents who are now practicing forensic pathologists.

WHAT IS THE GREATEST CHALLENGE OF BEING A FORENSIC PATHOLOGIST?

Finding work-life balance, depending on your case load, and admitting to one's self, when appropriate, when counseling/debriefing/stress reduction is called for. The work is hard and traumatic, and we often see some of the worst things humans can do to themselves and others. It takes an emotional and physical toll, and it's important to 1) admit it to one's self and 2) do something about it.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES/CHALLENGES OF FORENSIC PATHOLOGY TODAY?

Recruiting the next generation and beyond of forensic pathologists is critical. Compounding the issue is relatively low pay compared to our general pathology colleagues who are hospital-based and the ever-present possibility of negative press and potential harassment, sometimes not just in spite of but because of doing the "right thing" as we see it with our opinions. Adequate funding of ME Offices by governmental agencies, and those same agencies recognizing the necessary independence of the office is an important challenge.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR MOST MEMORABLE CASE AND WHY?

There are so many memorable cases, but two stand out. One is the Carrollton bus collision of May 1988, the worst DUI collision in US history with 27 dead. In the midst of that horror, the way multiple agencies and individuals came together to help was an inspiration, as was Dr. George Nichols' ingenious decision to move the crime scene, the bus itself on Interstate 71, to the National Guard Armory for examination. The other was the accidental shooting by an African-American man of his white friend in SE Kentucky in the late 90s, and I performed the autopsy. In response, the Klan decided to march in that town, and a local minister and the county's coroner put together an interfaith anti-Klan rally on the opposite side of town. I was invited by the minister and coroner to speak as a forensic pathologist and as a Jew on the fallout of senseless hatred, and Reverend Derek Penwell and former Coroner Bill Bisceglia remain dear friends to this day.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST UNEXPECTED FINDING YOU HAVE ENCOUNTERED DURING A CASE?

Situs inversus totalis certainly stands out, perhaps along with a 60 lb / 27 kg toxic megacolon.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT WORKING WITH YOUR TEAM?

Their wonderful mix of professionalism, collegiality, and appropriate humor.

WHO IS YOUR ROLE MODEL AND WHY?

Like many of us, I've had several. Dr. J. Hill Hamon, my undergrad professor who with erudition and humor got this English major interested in science. Dr. Larry Giltman, med school pathology professor who let me know about this entity called pathology and lab medicine. Dr. L.C. McCloud, a Kentucky forensic pathologist who was among the smartest, kindest, and funniest individuals I've ever known. If I ever say something good to my trainees or in court, it's most likely his wisdom speaking via me, his former resident.

WHAT ARE YOUR HOBBIES AND HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN A WORK-LIFE BALANCE?

Walking/sauntering/hiking, be it urban, rural, or wilderness; reading fiction or non-fiction that has nothing to do with medicine; and a meal with family and/or friends. Maintaining a work-life balance is always a challenge, but that helps. A lot.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE WORK SOUNDTRACK AND WHY?

Instrumental guitar or any of a large number of singer-songwriters. Acoustic is best. It gives me energy and helps me focus.

WHAT IS YOUR MOST-LIKED MEAL AT YOUR FAVORITE LOCAL RESTAURANT?

Vegetarian pho and salad rolls at Pho Saigon, Lexington, KY - by far!