

Elizabeth A. Bundock, MD PhD



Current Position:

Chief Medical Examiner, Vermont

Education History:

Undergraduate Education: Purchase College, State University of New York

Medical School: Chicago Medical School/Rosalind Franklin University

Residency Program: Brigham and Women's Hospital

Fellowship: New York City Office of Chief Medical Examiner

Other: Neuropathology Fellowship, Brigham and Women's Hospital and Boston Children's Hospital

HOW DID YOU INITIALLY BECOME INTERESTED IN FORENSIC PATHOLOGY?

After completing my PhD in Neuroscience and medical school, pathology was the clear choice for me. My pathology residency rotation in forensic pathology was entertaining, but I didn't really give the career choice a second thought. I continued through residency to neuropathology fellowship - my singular mission at the time. Neuropathology fellowship requires forensic NP experience. So my NP mentor, Dr. Umberto DeGirolami, sent me to NYC OCME to spend two weeks shadowing his colleague Dr. Vernon Armbrustmacher. That was the first fateful step. I returned home to finish my NP fellowship knowing I wanted to include forensic consulting in my career as a surgical neuropathologist. The next fateful step, several months later, was a phone call from Dr. Mark Flomenbaum, First Deputy Chief Medical Examiner of the NYC OCME at the time, asking if I would like to return for a fellowship position. It honestly hadn't occurred to me before that moment. After thinking it over for a couple of weeks, I accepted. The rest is history. I was hooked. I now practice forensic pathology full time and continue neuropathology consulting privately.

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?

Be honest with yourself about what you love to do and what your strengths and weaknesses are. If you are self-motivated, thrive when immersed in an analytical or technical challenge, are confident

and resilient, have good communication skills and are empathetic, you will fit here. If you are also excited and just can't get enough of forensic pathology, then you will do well and survive. You need to be all in.

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

Knowing there are people depending on or benefiting from the answers is a definite perk.

WHAT IS THE GREATEST CHALLENGE OF BEING A FORENSIC PATHOLOGIST?

Consistency in attentiveness, perseverance, and decision making. Some days are too busy and others easy. Some cases are fascinating and others routine. Some years you have extra energy and others you have none. The challenge is to approach every case with the same attention, determination, and consideration irrespective of those variations.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR MOST MEMORABLE CASE AND WHY?

My first dismemberment homicide. That's when I realized this stuff doesn't just happen in the movies.

WHO IS YOUR ROLE MODEL AND WHY?

I am continually inspired by Dr. Rebecca Folkerth, my neuropathology fellowship mentor who switched gears by moving to the NYC OCME after an already notable career in surgical neuropathology and research. With excitement and smiles, she brings her amazing diagnostic skills and humility to every case, equally ready to tell it like it is or learn something new. If I can be half the teacher, scholar, investigator, and diagnostician she is, I will call it a good career!

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

Horseback riding is my primary hobby. When I arrive at the barn, everything else just fades away. It's my respite even though it's actually quite a bit of work. I also enjoy making art, being in the peace of a deep forest (often with my horse), and sailing. I certainly work too much, so having all-absorbing hobbies that force me to turn off the work brain or completely introspective, peaceful hobbies are essential.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE WORK SOUNDTRACK AND WHY?

I like wordless, slightly upbeat but relaxing background music while doing histology and paperwork. After reading Dr. Gorniak's faculty profile, streaming the Vitamin String Quartet "radio" playlist is just right. Thank you Jan.