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countries of Eastern Europe, though somewhat different, is generally similar.

FORENSIC MEDICAL SERVICES IN ISRAEL

HEINRICH KARPLUS*

Forensic Medicine in Israel has undergone significant changes in the last eleven years since the enactment in 1958 of legislation which abolished the coroner system that had existed under the British Mandatory Authority. Under the new system the magistrate is now the controlling authority and he can order an investigation into the cause of a death if so requested by the police, an attorney, a physician, or the deceased's relatives. The magistrate can authorize an autopsy or, if he decides against it, he can issue a burial order. Once he has been approached, neither autopsy nor burial can be undertaken without his authority. The 1958 law empowers him to order exhumation from any official burial ground within his district, whether death had taken place in Israel or abroad. Bodies buried outside a cemetery may be exhumed without a magisterial order. Any death in a closed institution (a prison or a home for the mentally retarded or ill) must be reported to the police, and it is investigated by them. The police may accept the death certificate of the attending physician, or they may reject it and request the magistrate to authorize an autopsy. This provision of the law provides more control over such institutions than usually exists in other countries.

The 1953 Anatomy and Pathology Act provides that an autopsy may be performed to establish the cause of death or to remove organs for transplantation. Three medical signatories are required for such an autopsy whether or not death occurred in a hospital. If the death did occur in a hospital the attending physician, the department head, and the hospital director must sign. If death occurred outside the hospital, the physician who pronounced the patient dead, a Government physician, and the director of a hospital must sign. The consent of the family is not required, and the only way in which the family can prevent an autopsy is to apply to the magistrate for an investigation into the cause of death and for a burial order without autopsy.

The Orthodox Jewish community, which resents the fact that

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autopsies can be performed without the consent or even the knowledge of the deceased's relatives, tried to block this legislation, but were unsuccessful. However, they are still trying to change the law on this matter.

Further provisions of the Act deal with the acquisition of bodies for teaching and research.

Most forensic autopsies for the civilian and military authorities in Israel are performed by the Greenberg Institute of Forensic Medicine in Tel Aviv and Haifa. The Institute is part of the Hebrew University Medical School. Over one thousand autopsies are performed annually and the Institute, in addition to complying with the 1953 and 1958 Acts, endeavors to obtain the written consent of the relatives to perform the autopsy and succeeds in over ninety per cent of its cases. The remaining ten per cent are performed on magisterial authorization which is granted at the request of the police or an interested physician. In certain cases the magistrate will authorize a burial without an autopsy. Burial is forbidden without a Burial Order.

The autopsy reports issued by the Institute have the legal force of an affidavit, which obviates undue waste of time arising from formal court hearings. Pathologists from the Institute appear relatively infrequently in court, and, being independent of the prosecution, can appear for either side. In addition to forensic pathology (which includes microscopic, photographic, and Roentgenologic follow-up where indicated), the Institute also maintains toxicology and serology laboratories.

In an average year the Institute conducts three hundred autopsies where death resulted from a highway accident, 100 suicides, and twenty murders. The remaining cases arise from accidental deaths at home, at work, or in a sport-related activity, and approximately five hundred unexpected deaths which upon autopsy turn out to be the result of natural causes.

The Institute serves the Ministries of Health, Police, Defense and Justice, and salaries are paid to the academic staff by the Hebrew University and to the clerical staff by the police.

Undergraduate instruction in forensic medicine is given in the faculties of law and medicine of the Hebrew University and Tel Aviv University, the Criminology Institutes of the Hebrew University and Bar Ilan University, and post graduate instruction is given in the Hebrew University and Tel Aviv University. Courses are also provided for police and army criminal investigation officers.