Letter From the Editor-In-Chief

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Editor-In-Chief

The theme of the second issue of 2017 is “SIDS?” and the Special Guest Editor is Dr. Melissa Pasquale-Styles. The theme is meant to be provocative, as was the paper that was published in the inaugural issue of *Academic Forensic Pathology* over six years ago (1). I think it is fair to say that the use of the term “SIDS” is falling out of favor with forensic pathologists. The number of cases of infant deaths certified as SIDS has been falling; this is likely due at least in part to a diagnostic shift amongst forensic pathologists to the diagnosis of “undetermined.” Although SIDS essentially means undetermined, the SIDS term had taken on a life of its own, and inadvertently became thought

of as an actual, singular entity—a real thing—rather than a descriptive term of classification for research purposes.

Other examples of the unintended consequence of using such descriptive acronyms are sudden unexplained infant death (SUID) and sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI). Both of these terms have been used by forensic pathologists to imply an undetermined cause of death in infants where no cause of death is found. However, the term SUID is defined quite differently by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). They define the term SUID to mean the “*death*

*of an infant less than 1 year of age that occurs suddenly and unexpectedly, and whose cause of death is not immediately obvious **before** investigation*” [bold emphasis mine] (2). This definition includes cases that are ultimately certified as SIDS, undetermined (even though SIDS means undetermined as well), and accidental suffocation and strangulation in bed. This is a drastically different definition from the meaning that a forensic pathologist is trying to convey, which is an “undetermined” cause of death *after* completion of the entire investigation. The reason that the CDC groups SIDS, undetermined, and asphyxial deaths of infants together is ostensibly to track all “unexpected” deaths in the infant population, understanding the inconsistency of certification amongst forensic pathologists. Imagine the confusion parents would feel if they were to see the diagnosis of SUID on a death certificate or autopsy report (where the forensic pathologist was implying an undetermined cause of death) and then they read the CDC literature and believe that the diagnosis is either undetermined or SIDS or asphyxia!

The issue begins with a historical paper about the history of SIDS. Another paper challenges the often-taught maxim that 10% of SIDS cases are actually

undiscovered homicides. While there are several papers discussing “complete” autopsies in adults, there are far fewer in the infant population, and we feature an article describing the approach to autopsying an infant who has died suddenly and unexpectedly. This is followed by papers discussing recommendations for neuropathologic examination in pediatric cases and the assessment and classification of apparent asphyxial deaths in the infant population. Finally, we feature a paper discussing the perceived unintended consequences of the diversion away from the “SIDS” diagnosis. We also feature several unsolicited articles.

The third issue of 2017 will be released on September 1; the theme will be “The Pathology of Terror” and the Special Guest Editor will be Dr. Michael Pollanen. But remember, only about half of each issue is devoted to the specific theme. It’s really just a way to promote submission of articles on a particular topic. Manuscripts about any topic can (and should) be submitted at any time! As always, I will continue to encourage the readership to submit articles to the Journal. We depend on submissions from the readership—NAME members like you—to sustain our excellent content.

- 1) Nashelsky MB, Pinckard JK. The death of SIDS. *Acad Forensic Pathol*. 2011 Jul; 1(1):92-8. <https://doi.org/10.23907/2011.010>.
- 2) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [Internet]. Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; c2017. Sudden unexpected infant death and sudden infant death syndrome; 2017 Feb 1 [cited 2017 May 8]. Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/sids/aboutsuidandsids.htm>.