Letter From the Guest Editor

Jason M. Wiersema PhD D-ABFA D-ABMDI
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Forensic anthropology has expanded its presence in the medical examiner/coroner's office setting exponentially in the past few decades. Historically, most forensic anthropologists were university faculty members who worked as consultants to local medicolegal or law enforcement agencies. There is now a considerable number of anthropologists embedded directly in medical examiner/coroner operations, and the caseload of the typical university-based anthropologist has increased significantly. There has been a concomitant expansion in the variety of questions asked of the forensic anthropologist. Historically, the primary role of the forensic anthropologist was in the development of a biological profile from unidentified skeletonized remains. In recent decades, their role has widened to include a variety of services including search and recovery of remains, trauma analysis, and radiographic identification. In fact, trauma analysis has become the primary contribution of the forensic anthropologist in some large medical examiners' offices. This issue is intended to update the understanding that forensic pathologists have of the array of contributions that the

forensic anthropologist can make to medicolegal investigations via a series of articles that address specific anthropological methods.

Forensic anthropologists are prolific researchers, and novel publications describing experimental evaluation of skeletal trauma and new methods for establishing the biological profile are regularly published in a variety of journals and texts. There is also significant recent research focused on assuring the validation of existing forensic anthropological methods and reporting. Beyond the forensic anthropological literature, there is also a wealth of skeletal biology literature that identifies and addresses the effects of temporal change and population level variation on the analysis of individual remains. Many of these publications are relevant to and have influenced forensic anthropological methods significantly. The Scientific Working Group for Forensic Anthropology (SWGANTH) was formed in 2008 to draw from all of this research a set of best practices for use by forensic anthropologists. The group developed and made publicly available a

significant number of documents pertaining to the appropriate application of anthropological methods for recovery of remains, sex, ancestry, age and stature estimation, and skeletal trauma analysis. These documents are now under review by the Forensic Anthropology Subcommittee of the Organization of Scientific Area Committees. Most active forensic anthropologists have embraced the guidance developed by these organizations, and if employed correctly, the practices they describe are both methodologically and scientifically sound.

However, there remains significant variation in training among forensic anthropologists. Unlike forensic pathology, there is no single curriculum through which forensic anthropologists must matriculate, nor are there enforceable restrictions on who can refer to themselves as a forensic anthropologist. There are a small number of universities from which the majority of forensic anthropologists have graduated, though the list has expanded considerably in recent years. The introductory courses available at these programs resemble each other generally, but the more specialized courses vary based on the interests of the particular faculties. There are often opportunities for students to gain response experience at these universities, but again there is no standard minimum level or variety of experience that typifies the forensic anthropologist. There is a greater number of postgraduate level training opportunities than in the past that include fellowship and/or visiting scientist programs at several medicolegal offices around the United States, though these types of programs remain few in number.

In spite of the variation in education and experience among forensic anthropologists, most have broad training in cultural anthropology, skeletal biology, archaeology, anatomy, physiology, human evolution, bone biology, paleopathology, functional morphology, histology, and biomechanics. As a result, the typical forensic anthropologist maintains 1) a population-based perspective on interpretation of skeletal variation as it pertains to sex, ancestry, and other demographic characteristics, 2) a bone biology based perspective on bone development, degradation, and response to traumatic insult, and 3) a detailed knowledge of archaeological methods for scene recovery.

In addition, there is a certifying body for forensic anthropology that requires a degree of standardization in training and certification among those who carry their certification. The American Board of Forensic Anthropology (ABFA) is a nonprofit organization, incorporated in 1977, that provides a program for certification of doctoral level forensic anthropologists. In addition to a PhD, ABFA certification requires three years of postgraduate casework experience, passage of a certifying exam, and maintenance of certification requiring an ongoing record of forensic anthropological casework activities and proficiency. The recommendation of the ABFA is that board-certified forensic anthropologists are the most appropriately qualified for consultation with forensic pathologists because 1) certification represents the highest level of achievement in the field rather than a minimum measure of competence, 2) certification requires rigorous examination and continued competency, and 3) the ABFA requires adherence to high standards of ethics, conduct, and professional practice. There are currently approximately 80 active ABFA-certified forensic anthropologists in 29 states.

Readers of this issue will find articles that address the theoretical underpinnings of forensic anthropology, as well as operational reviews of forensic anthropological methods for site recovery, sex, age and ancestry estimation, and the application of these methods in the medicolegal and mass fatality contexts. My hope is that this issue will serve as an introduction to the value of the forensic anthropologist to those who are unfamiliar and a reference for those who have experience working with an anthropologist.

I would like to thank Dr. Keith Pinckard for the invitation to guest edit this issue and more broadly for providing this conduit to communicate the role of the anthropologist directly to the *AFP* readership. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the various anthropologists who took the time to contribute to this important issue. Each was selected carefully, and each is a preeminent expert in the particular part of forensic anthropology about which they authored articles for this issue.