

Review

Reviews of books for this section are welcomed from osteopathic physicians and from faculty members in osteopathic medical institutions. Interested individuals will be sent information on format on request. A certain number of reviews are invited for books supplied to JAOA by publishers; persons wishing to be part of this program should write to the editors, giving background and areas of interest.

Death to Dust: What Happens to Dead Bodies?

By Kenneth V. Iserson, MD. Pp 636, with illus. Galen Press, Ltd, PO Box 6440, Tucson, AZ 85728-4400, 1994, \$38.95.

This book is an exhaustive compilation of information covering virtually all aspects of what happens to a body after death. Amazingly thorough, this work includes everything from the history of postmortem rituals to cryonic suspension—freezing dead bodies to be thawed and restored to life once cures have been discovered for illnesses that caused death in the first place. In between, *Death to Dust: What Happens to Dead Bodies?* discusses organ transplantation, autopsy examination, cremation, cannibalism, cemeteries, and much more.

Dozens—and sometimes even hundreds—of references accompany each chapter. In fact, the well-organized material is arranged so that the reader can immediately find any topic. Both

of these characteristics make this work, in some ways, resemble a textbook. Yet, the writing style makes for a pleasant read. In fact, many parts of the book are so intriguing that I found it difficult at times to put it down.

The thoroughness of the research shows in the accuracy of the content. Only rarely did some minor point vary with my experience, such as the statement that the onset of rigor mortis is quicker in a cold environment. I found this accuracy commendable, especially in light of the outrageous fallacies routinely presented in the print and television regarding those issues surrounding death.

Just about anyone will appreciate this book. *Death to Dust: What Happens to Dead Bodies?* is not necessarily geared toward physicians, but we would do well to read and use it as a reference on issues surrounding death.

Many of the issues presented here are woefully unfamiliar to physicians whose daily practices would benefit from such knowledge, particularly in understanding the cultural differences that surround death. If this book has one weakness, it is that the material covers such a large scope that not every reader will find every bit of information interesting. Conversely, a reference textbook such as this should hardly be criticized for being too complete. Personally, I would have liked seeing more illustrations; however, the book's current size (more than 600 pages) may have made this addition impractical.

In general, it is safe to assume that most persons know little

about what happens to a body after death. Perhaps they do not wish to know too much. But for those readers who *do* want to know all, it's waiting to be revealed in *Death to Dust: What Happens to Dead Bodies?*

R. F. DiStefano, DO

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