

Director's Editorial:

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Legal Medicine in Italy: The times, they are a-changing.

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*Then you'd better start swimming or
you'll sink like a stone
For the times, they are a-changing¹*

Italian Legal Medicine has a great past, dating from Paolo Zacchia's *Quaestiones Medico Legales*, nine volumes published between 1621 and 1651. While in many country scholars from different medical specialities developed forensic skills and Pathologist subspecialized in Forensic Pathology, Psychiatrists studied criminal minds, Biologists developed the well known forensic use of genetic markers, Toxicologists studied illicit drugs and poisons, Italian *Medici Legali* kept these sub-disciplines under the starry dome of the same temple: *Res Medica Sub Specie Juris*.

Of course different paths were walked by our Doctors as Technology became more and more complicated and a single man could not be anymore learned enough in every aspect of the Discipline; as happened after Reinassance, Science and Art needed specialization and deepening as Knowledge became too broad for one man's brain. The Italian peculiarity, however, was to house Scientist dedicated to different aspects of Legal (not necessary always Forensic) Sciences under the same roof, to maintain a broad knowledge of the Craft and the skills to understand when help from another Scientist was needed, and the ability to interpret the meaning of provided data as well.

Since a quarter of a century ago the cultural center of Legal Medicine lied in Universities and little existed out of the Academic walls: Specialist working for

¹ Bob Dylan, The Times They Are a-changing, 1964.

Public and Private Insurances did not produce a great flow of scientific contributions, Autopsy Rooms and Laboratories were generally hosted in well-funded University Institutes of Legal Medicine and a few Hospitals had Medico Legal Units.

Then something changed: the need for Legal Medicine was perceived in the National Health System, as a proper methodology was essential to evaluate an increasing number of needy impaired citizens asking for benefits; malpractice cases increased; more autopsies and toxicological examinations had to be performed in places with no Academic Institutions. At the same time, Specialists working for the Workmen Compensation Public Insurance and the Retirement and Disability System felt the need for a scientific evaluation of their activities. Legal Medicine stepped out University gates, spreading in the outer world.

Then, due to a global recession, University public funding dropped dramatically: retired professors were not replaced, the expensive instruments needed for the laboratories could not be bought anymore if an economical return was not foreseen. Many Institutes became the shadow of a glorious past and only the few enlightened Professors who could make relevant organizational changes could thrive and maintain paramount scientific standards.

Nowadays an attitude change is needed in order to survive as a Discipline. Things cannot be anymore as they used to be and a new dome has to be built to give shelter to the many souls of Legal Medicine. Non Academic organizations are now prevailing, at least in numbers, and the Academic world is today just a part of the picture, but its preservation and integration is in the best interest of the Discipline itself because undergraduate and postgraduate teaching is performed in Universities: there lies our future. Meeting points are needed, forgetting out-of-date disagreements and confrontations: Legal Medicine can survive only if we'll have the ability to stick together to pursue a common good.

This Journal has the ambition to give a tile for the building of such a dome, hosting scientific contributions from the Medico Legal community as a whole.

Our second ambition is of equal relevance. As we believe that the main strength of Italian Legal Medicine lies primarily in its methodological and interdisciplinary approach, our goal is to let Forensic Scientists around the world get along with the particular features and strong points of our Discipline. Linguistic barriers need to be overcome publishing contributions in a language understood everywhere in the Scientific Community, thus we ask our Authors to write in English the full text or a lengthy English abstract at least, *for the times, they are a-changing*.

Wish us good luck!