

Murder, Science and Good Coffee...

In February 2010 I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to attend the American Association of Forensic Sciences (AAFS) annual meeting in Seattle WA. Now, if I am honest, I was slightly daunted by the prospect of travelling thousands of miles across the Atlantic to hang out with some of the top minds in modern forensic science. My initial thought was "I am just a Radiographer, what am I doing going to the AAFS?" I would later discover that this initial reaction couldn't have been more inaccurate.



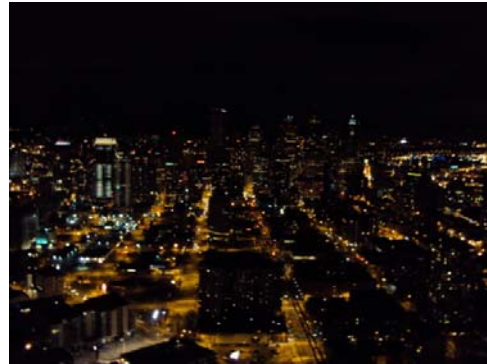
The Famous Space Needle

Seattle was perfectly suited to a first time attendee of the AAFS, any initial anxieties of arriving at such a prestigious event were soon forgotten at the first morning meeting, which was welcoming and friendly. Everyone wanted to talk and discover what had brought you to Seattle (A question I was keen to answer myself), whether it be a forensic pathologist from Korea or a medical student from North Carolina. I experienced this warmth both in and out of the conference, the people of Seattle were both welcoming and extremely friendly.

So I set out to answer my question "what does a radiographer have to offer the world of Forensic science?" The conference itself ran over a period of a week and had numerous seminars and open forums on contemporary forensics which covered several aspects such as: engineering services, odontology, physical anthropology etc. It was difficult at first to work out how the conference worked, after a brief visit to a technical engineering lecture I soon realised I needed to stick to content which I may have a chance of understanding, no matter how interesting the graphs were that several rather intellectual men were all applauding I still had no idea what they were on about.

So to Professor G Brogdon, the IAFR patron, to help me understand what Radiology has to offer, his first talk of the week was about how CT can help in the deliberation of evidence in court. It made it quite clear that cross sectional imaging has uses not only in assessing extent of injury in a violent trauma but how this can be valuable evidence for a judge and jury in making decisions in court. So it would appear that CT has application in modern forensics, this was further investigated by A. Dominguez who talked about the potential for radiographers to be involved in handling post mortem scanning. In particular he talked about the potential for post mortem angiography (that blew my mind a bit) and how a radiographer is necessary to guarantee a good quality radiological examination. I was now starting to understand the

passion that many seem to have for radiologic examinations in forensic science, it seemed that the future of post mortem investigations may well fall into the remit of forensic Radiology. Many other seminars such as CT autopsy in suicide by gunshot to the head and using 3D imaging for bone analysis again put forward ideas and theories that push radiology into the forefront of modern forensics. I should say at this point that though 3D techniques were discussed plain film radiography was not forgotten at the conference, seminars on the importance of accurate positioning of anti and post mortem dental images were one of the many interesting lectures on the significance of plain film in forensics.



Seattle by night

I was beginning to see that a radiographer does has a rightful place at the side of other forensic professionals as a legitimate forensic specialist. Walking through the numerous stands and displays in the exhibition hall at the Washington State Convention & Trade Centre showed me the new technology moving towards the use of radiology in mass fatality situations, utilising smaller more portable x-ray units as displayed at the MinXray stand. Other companies such as Kubtec also represented the world of radiology with their portable x-ray machines capable of fine detailed imaging of specimens and other items, such as my wallet... they didn't find any money though.



Myself and Denise Elliot at MinXray

After the hectic schedule of seminars and poster presentations there was time for quiet reflection on what I had seen and heard in over the days that I attended the conference. Forensic science is a multi faceted industry which is forever moving forward to, in the words of Prof Brogden "search for the truth". I would like this opportunity to thank the IAFR for this experience; I have taken so much from it that will, I hope, improve my own practice as a forensic radiographer. Forensic Radiography is forever growing with new ideas and technical developments, from what I have seen and heard it will no doubt become the manner in which post mortem examinations are undertaken. If ever posed the question does a radiographer belong at the AAFS, my answer will be a resounding YES!