Peter Sidebotham and Peter Fleming, Unexpected death in childhood. A handbook for practitioners

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T. Bajanowski

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The investigation of childhood deaths is complex and complicated, in particular, if the death occurred unexpectedly. A professional investigation requires special knowledge and impact from different fields of medicine, psychology, and criminology. Therefore, the authors cite the words of Baroness Helena Kennedy, “it is every family’s right to have their baby’s death properly investigated,” as a motto of the book and give an extensive overview on the investigation of infant or childhood deaths to support good practice, based on a fundamental understanding of mechanisms of childhood deaths.

The two editors include the opinions of nine other contributors, all experienced with infant or childhood death and its investigation. Part I gives background knowledge to understand these deaths and to answer the questions of the bereaved parents. In part II, the authors focus on investigation techniques and explain their own experiences. They recommend a systematic investigation of the circumstances of death

and a “sensitive, caring approach to support the family.” They use experiences from investigations of deaths from abuse or neglect and explain that reviewing all childhood deaths can be helpful to prevent these deaths in the future.

In 16 appendices, important information for health professionals and parents are given in form of practical tools and protocols, starting with emergency department flow charts and checklists and ending with tools for developing a child death reviewing team.

The book shows that the authors have an extended knowledge in this field and, moreover, a long-standing experience in doing such investigations. The book integrates different resources, refers the special situation in the UK, explores new guidelines and legislation, and reflects the relevant literature in this field. It gives practical advice to professionals and can be recommended for specialists in legal medicine and specialists from other fields involved in the investigation of these deaths inside and outside the UK.

T. Bajanowski (✉)
Institute of Legal Medicine, University of Essen,
Hufelandstraße 55,
45122 Essen, Germany
e-mail: thomas.bajanowski@uk-essen.de