Regarding “The ongoing loss of historical material from institutions”

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In his editorial [1], among other things, Byard stated “...There has been a trend to remove historical records and materials from museums and storage areas... Are we losing vital data and materials in an attempt to remove what is currently perceived as not wanted or unnecessary?” The answer is yes, we are. “Once this material is gone it will never be retrievable” [1].

Only a few forensic specimens assembled by the founder of forensic pathology in Serbia, Dr. Eduard Michel (1864–1915), survived the Habsburg occupation during the First World War [2, 3]. His collection was expanded by his successor Professor Milovan Milovanović (1884–1948) [3]. Milovanović used the collection as a teaching resource. Thanks to the efforts of his successor Professor Julijana Bogičević (1900–1977), the first female dean of the School of Medicine in 1958–60 [3], not only this collection, but the entire Institute’s archive has been preserved. All of these were packed into folders, stored in shelves and cabinets, and later forgotten; after the retirement of Professor Bogičević (in 1971), the remaining younger staff lost all interest in the material. Much of it was misplaced, uninteresting to the majority, and hidden from view; thus, luckily, it was not scattered or destroyed. The first steps in (re)revealing the value of the preserved collection and documents were made by Professor Snežana Veljković (1946–2020) [3], and she encouraged us to take an active role in preserving the collection and documents. Unfortunately, in the meantime, much has been forgotten and some is forever lost.

After we cracked the code that Professor Milovanović used to label the forensic specimens, we were able to connect them with their specific autopsy reports, and link them to papers [4] and textbooks [5] published as far back as 120 years ago. Hence, it is very important that there is a thread which connects older and younger staff through verbal tradition, a heritage through which younger staff can

comprehend the historical significance of some events, documents and forensic specimens. The best way of spreading professional knowledge is verbally, from mentors to apprentices; archive materials and forensic specimens can be of great help. They are not merely body parts preserved in formalin. Each of them hides a story, context and reasons why it was preserved, conserved and presented.

“The belief that all that is old is somehow outdated and of no contemporary significance “ [1] serves as an excuse for some colleagues to ignore and/or negate all or most of the previously done work, falsely increasing their own importance.

Do we need to stop the ongoing loss of historical material from our institutions? Yes, we do. We must stop it right away.

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