

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Authors' Response to Peterson et al Response

See Original Dror et al Article *here*

See JFS Editor-in-Chief Preface *here*

See Peterson et al Commentary on *here*

See Authors' Response to Peterson et al Commentary on *here*

See Peterson et al Response to Authors' Response *here*

Editor,

In our previous response to the Peterson et al. Letter, we explained our data [1] and provided further clarifications. Rather than debating the issues of potential bias in forensic pathology decisions and what can be done about it, three of the original authors (Peterson, Gill, and Oliver) decided to engage in a litany of baseless allegations and *ad hominem* attacks. These include, among other things, claiming that our paper is "intentionally misleading" and "academically vacuous, intellectually dishonest and intentionally deceptive."

We do not wish to engage in such a level of personal attacks or the Sisyphean task of arguing with dogmatists who refuse to listen and engage in a legitimate professional debate. Indeed, the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) has filed formal complaints with such allegations against the lead author, which were independently investigated and dismissed. However, this does not seem to deter the authors from continuing to make such false and vicious personal attacks. Similarly, their formal requests to JFS to have the paper retracted have been investigated and dismissed too, but nevertheless, they ignore its findings and just continue to say that "the Journal of Forensic Sciences must retract" the paper. It seems that they will not listen and have just lost the plot and direction—which should be examining forensic pathology decisions, reflecting on potential bias and error, and considering what can be done to improve manner of death determinations.

Please do not misinterpret our brevity as a concession or a sign that we cannot rebut each and every point in their new Letter. We certainly could, but instead of getting distracted and pulled into counterproductive arguments (e.g., about the meaning and implication of "Humpty Dumpty"—see Peterson, Gill, and Oliver Letter...), which are just distracting attention from the real issue, we want to keep the focus on the important matter at hand: bias in forensic pathology decisions. We urge people to read our paper [1] (as well as the ensuing Letters and Responses) and see for themselves so they can form their own opinions on our paper and on NAME's responses to it. Not only did our paper undergo a rigorous peer review before publication, but it has now also undergone a number of additional

thorough and independent investigations in response to formal complaints made by NAME—and in each case, the investigations reaffirmed the validity of our study and found no merit in the complaints.

There may be legitimate disagreements about bias in forensic pathology. Such disagreements and debates are not a bad thing, but need to be debated civilly and professionally, so we can all work together toward the common goal of strengthening forensic pathology.

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REFERENCE

1. Dror I, Melinek J, Arden JL, Kukucka J, Hawkins S, Carter J, et al. Cognitive bias in forensic pathology decisions. *J Forensic Sci.* 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1556-4029.14697>. Epub 2021 Feb 20.

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