Meeting report

Impressions from the 9th Virtopsy Course

The 9th Virtopsy Course took place in Zurich from March 18 to 22, 2013. The first Virtopsy course had been organized in 2006 by professors Richard Dirnhofer, Peter Vock, and Michael Thali. Since then, Virtopsy team has organized one or two courses every year and the course program has significantly evolved over time.

This year’s course was organized in collaboration between the Institutes of Forensic Medicine in Zurich and in Lausanne and offered a 2-day basic course followed by a 3-day advanced course. It was the first time that the basic and advanced course were combined into one full week of forensic imaging.

In our experience, this combination was certainly beneficial to the participants. This year’s 24 participants of the fully booked course came from all over the world, some from as far away as Australia (Fig. 1). Indeed, the constellation of the participants backgrounds with regard to country of origin (15 different countries!) and professional expertise (12 forensic pathologists, 8 radiologists, 2 radiographers, 1 forensic anthropologist and 1 member of the industry) made a very constructive mixture and lead to many interesting discussions during the sessions, the numerous breaks and the social events in the evenings and have very likely built the fundament of new international collaborations and networks (Fig. 2).

During the basic course, the participants learnt the basics of forensic practice and post-mortem CT and MR imaging as well as surface scanning. The lectures consisted of a theoretical presentation followed by a hands-on sessions for which the participants worked on individual work-station (Figs. 3 and 4).

The following advanced course started off with the post-mortem examination of a real and actual case, encompassing scanning preparation, scanning, image interpretation and reporting, forensic autopsy and finally, the correlation of imaging findings to autopsy findings (Figs. 5–9). This was certainly a highlight of the course and enabled the participants to experience the actual workflow in real cases. Another highlight was the newly installed “bring your own cases”-session, where course participants were invited to present a case from their practice. In several of these cases, post-mortem imaging prior to autopsy had already been used, and this session was a good opportunity to discuss ambiguous imaging findings. The second day of the Virtopsy Advanced Course was dedicated to post-mortem CT-angiography. All participants traveled by bus to Lausanne to get an introduction to theoretical and practical aspects of contrast enhanced post-mortem CT. The last day of the course focussed on forensic imaging of the living, special focus sessions on forensic MR, as well as an invited lecture by Dr. Hatem Alkadhi from the Institute of Diagnostic and Interventional Radiology at the University Hospital Zurich, on dual-energy CT and forensic applications of dual-energy CT.

Another interesting fact of this year’s course was that the course manager, Dr. Garyfalia Ampanozi, is herself a former attendee of a Virtopsy Course. Ampanozi, who is a board-certified Greek forensic pathologist had attended the 4th Virtopsy Course in Berne and afterwards joined the Virtopsy team as a full-time member in 2009. The circumstance that this very successful course was organized by Dr. Garyfalia certainly concurs with the
Fig. 2. The invited dinner on Monday evening was certainly a good opportunity to get to know each other better.

Fig. 3. During the lectures, the participants were working on individual PACS workstations to review cases.

Fig. 4. During the lectures, the participants were working on individual PACS workstations to review cases.
The first day of the Advanced course consisted of a full-day workshop to illustrate the workflow of real cases. First step: post-mortem whole-body CT.

Post-mortem CT is followed by surface scanning and robotic tissue biopsy.

The attendees are reading post-mortem CT images of the case of the day and discuss findings with course instructors.
often quoted saying “see one, do one, teach one”. In addition, it indicates how important international courses and meetings are to set up networks and collaborations.

The importance of forensic imaging in general and the Virtopsy courses in particular is conﬁrmed by the awarding of CME credits to the course for the first time. The EACCME (European Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education) and the SGR (Swiss Society for Radiology) awarded the basic course 9 points, the Swiss Society for Legal Medicine (SGRM) 8 points, and the advanced course was awarded 15 points from EACCME and SGR and 13 from the SGRM.

Indeed, the fact that former course participants have meanwhile become teachers proves Michael Thali’s introductory talk wrong. He stated that he had a dream that forensic imaging may be the future. Forensic imaging, as this year’s course has shown yet again, is the future. It is certainly not a dream anymore.

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Fig. 8. The attendees are reading post-mortem CT images of the case of the day and discuss ﬁndings with course instructors.

Fig. 9. All ﬁndings from post-mortem CT are being reported to the forensic pathologist prior to autopsy.