

PRESS RELEASE

Croatian Medical Journal
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are freely available at www.cmj.hr

Botany – rarely used tool in forensic sciences

ZAGREB – A tiny berry and a stem fragment found in the young woman's hair helped investigators to determine the cause of her death. The moss found on the wrists of a hanged man indicated that he committed suicide. Algae on the T-shirt of a husband disclosed him as a murderer of his wife.

There is something in common with these forensic cases: they were all solved by the careful analysis of plant evidence found at the crime scene. In the new, thematic issue of the *Croatian Medical Journal*, a group of American and Taiwan scientists point out the importance of botany in forensic sciences.

In spite of the aforementioned examples, botany is still an under-utilized resource in forensic casework. Plant evidence can be of great help in a forensic investigation, but the value of such evidence will depend on what transpired or was overlooked at the crime scene. Critical to the evaluation of plant evidence is careful collection, documentation, and preservation for later scientific analysis. Without the first steps of the process being performed properly, the legal acceptance of the evidence into court may be called into question.

The paper published in the *Croatian Medical Journal* reviews proper procedures and recent cases where botanical evidence played a role in establishing either manner or time of death. Judging by these examples, forensic botany could prove interesting not only to professionals and experts, but also to all avid readers of crime novels or crime section of daily newspapers.

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