

DEATH--ITS MEDICO-LEGAL ASPECTS

Definition: The term death is commonly employed to denote "the cessation of life in the body as a whole".

The science which deals with death is known as *Thanatology*.

Death is of two types--(a) Clinical or Somatic or Systematic: It is that state of the body showing complete cessation of the function of three important structure, *i.e.*, brain, heart and lungs.

This is called the "tripod of life".

(b) Cellular or Molecular Death: It is death at the cellular level and it takes place sometime after the clinical death. It is this death which is responsible for cooling of the body and the temperature of the body becomes that of its environments.

It takes place after 3 to 4 hours after the stoppage of vital functions.

Modes of death: In all forms of death there are three principle modes of death:, *viz.*

1. Syncope.
2. Asphyxia.
3. Coma.

SYNCOPE

In this it is the heart which stops functioning first. The term 'Syncope' is often used for transient unconsciousness, *e.g.*, in cardiac arrest. The causes of syncope are:

(a) Haermorrhage: Excessive loss of blood as a result of injury to a large blood vessel or blood vessel of internal organs resulting in severe anemia.

(b) Vaso Vagal Shock: There is excessive stimulation of the vagus nerve resulting in stoppage of heart. This is brought about by severe head injuries, sudden evacuation of natural or pathological fluids of the body.