ABSTRACT

Digital photography is currently an indispensable tool in routine medico-legal and forensic activities. Among others, the relevance of photographic documentation is clearly identified within the Forensic Clinic field (in the medico-legal examinations carried out in Criminal, Civil and Labour Law, in order to document injuries and sequelae), as well as within the Forensic Pathology (e.g. in crime scene investigation, in recording any personal identification elements and injuries or other findings during the autopsy procedure) or Criminalistics fields (e.g. in recording instruments, surfaces, tool marks and physical or biological traces). Such a digital photographic record is intended to document, illustrate and highlight certain aspects described in the forensic report, forming a material part of the forensic expertise. The use of this form of preservation and record of elements with probative value should therefore be systematic, like different forensic standards on the matter advocate. Furthermore, the use of digital photography must comply with a set of standards to be known by the forensic expert, so that on one hand the information conveyed is in fact what was observed, and on the other it ensures the reliability of the proof intended to be made.

There are no published studies in Portugal on medico-legal and forensic photography, and even in the international context most publications are mostly dedicated to issues related to crime scene investigation. Thereby, given the importance and relevance of improving the knowledge on this matter and defining standards for this activity in the forensic setting, the general objective of this work is to help ensure the best technical and scientific quality of forensic reports (by adding photographs properly performed and appropriate to each case) and ensure the rights of the victims, thus contributing to a proper administration of justice.

In order to achieve this goal, a comprehensive review of scientific literature on the subject and a study of 120 expert reports that included photographic documentation were performed. We sought to highlight the main difficulties and problems found in the northern medico-legal services of the National Institute of Legal Medicine, P.I., so that to propose general rules for the performance, filing and publication of forensic photographs.

KEYWORDS
Forensic Photography, Digital Photography, Forensic Pathology, Forensic Clinic