



F29 Repositories of Missing Persons and Dead Bodies in Different Countries — A Comparison

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The educational objective of this presentation is to present a survey on the inclusion of dental records in the repositories of missing persons and dead bodies, and the involvement of forensic dentists in the keeping and searching of these repositories. The attendee will also learn of the usefulness of the repositories in the identification procedures in different countries.

Thousands of people disappear in any given country each year. Fortunately, most of them are found or return within a short period of time. However, a percentage of those who disappear do not return and nothing is known of what has befallen them, causing emotional and legal problems to their families. A certain number of human remains found are not identified and these bodies are buried as unknown persons. This "Silent Disaster" never reaches front pages of the papers, nor is it broadcasted on national networks. Nevertheless, the missing and the unidentified dead often exceed the number of people who perish in real disasters each year. Repositories of missing persons and unknown bodies exist in most countries but the usefulness of these repositories differs from country to country, depending on how they are kept, updated, who is in charge of them and who can use them. This study seeks to compare the standard and efficacy of the repositories of missing persons and dead bodies between several countries.

A questionnaire was sent out to forensic odontologists and forensic odontology contacts in 119 countries by e-mail or snail-mail. Their addresses were found on the Internet, in the *Journal of Forensic Odontostomatology* or on the lists of international contacts in the field of forensic odontology. More than one person was contacted in some countries. The specific items investigated were: Who kept the repositories? Was dental information (dental records) included in the files of missing persons and dead bodies? Was a forensic dentist involved in the keeping and searching of the repositories? How useful was the repository? (The number of unknown bodies identified per year versus the number of bodies buried unidentified per year?)

Out of the 119 countries contacted 66 responded. Among the responders were almost all countries of the Western Europe, some of the countries of Eastern Europe, a few from Asia, Africa and South America, and then the U.S. and Canada from North America. Australia and New Zealand responded as well. The results showed that the police and/or the forensic centers kept the repositories. Dental records were included in the files in 32 countries and not included in 14 countries. Among the remaining 20 countries the responses varied between "usually" and "seldom." In 25 countries the forensic dentist was involved in keeping and searching the repositories whereas he/she was not involved in 28 countries, and in 13 countries the involvement of the forensic dentist varied considerably. The statistics on identification of recovered remains varied between "less than 1% or seldom" and "100% identified or no identification rare." Also, responders from 19 countries were unable to provide the number of positive identifications versus the number of remains buried as unknown since they had no access to that information.

There were significantly fewer unknown bodies buried each year in those countries where the dental records were included in the files of repositories of missing persons and dead bodies and a forensic odontologist was involved in the keeping and making searches of these files, as compared to the countries where the forensic odontologist was not involved. This was due to the fact that the recovered remains could be identified swiftly and with greater ease by a forensic dentist with the help of dental records in the missing persons files.

It was concluded that the inclusion of dental records and the involvement of a forensic dentist in the keeping of repositories of missing persons and dead bodies greatly increased the number of positive identifications of unknown bodies and should be standard in all countries.

Missing Persons Repository, Forensic Odontology, Identification