



F11 A Trilogy - Lessons Learned

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After attending this presentation the participant will understand how to avoid some of the common pitfalls faced by odontologists in the three main areas of forensic dentistry: bite mark analysis, victim identification, and missing persons; and learn about three cases will be presented with insight on how to utilize all available information and evidence in reaching a positive conclusion in your investigation and routine procedures to follow even in what appears to be the simplest of cases.

Case #1: "DO THE DENTURES FIT?" What started out as a routine request by the local medical examiner concerning the identification of a badly decomposed male and whether dentures found at the scene belonged to the victim, could have turned into a mis-identification based on assumptions and the limited antemortem information available. At the time of the examination, the investigators for the medical examiner said that no antemortem dental records could be found for this victim. What started out routinely, turned into several sleepless nights when the medical examiner, upon receiving my report asked if the victim's body could have been switched with someone with a similar dentition. The author will share some of the routine procedures that followed in similar cases with limited antemortem information and the conclusions now in use in reports related to victims based on "DO THE DENTURES FIT?"

Case #2: "WHO FILLED OUT THE MISSING PERSON NCIC FORM?" A female skeleton is recovered and both the anthropologist and forensic dentist agree on the age of this victim as being 14-years-old (+ 30 months). Unique dental features are noted, including severe overlapping and mal-occlusion of the maxillary anterior teeth and a retained primary left second molar with no radiographic evidence of the permanent premolar replacement. Why did it take ten months to identify this missing teen when all of the proper NCIC forms were filed in a timely manner?

Case #3: "WHERE'S THE RULER?" A dedicated detective working a 22-year-old cold case involving the rape and murder of a single mother, is able to use DNA technology, un-available in 1980, to link a suspect not previously thought to be involved in this case. In addition to the recovered DNA, a bite mark noted at autopsy but never analyzed, now became part of this new investigation. Only one autopsy photograph, showing the bite mark, was available after 22 years. Although excellent detail of the bite mark was present in this photograph, there was no ruler present to help resize this pattern injury. A ring noted on one of the victim's fingers had been lost over the years. This case was a good example on how to utilize the crime scene photographs and other evidence recovered from the crime scene to resize to a 1:1 ratio the bite mark injury. Although the defense in this case felt they had a strong argument to fight the DNA evidence, this changed when presented with the bite mark comparison. The suspect eventually pleads guilty to first-degree murder, a murder he had gotten away with for 22 years.

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