



Odontology Section – 2005

F14 Practical Guidelines for Releasing Dental Records When Requested by the Medical Examiner's Office

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The goal of this presentation is to create a better understanding of which records are useful for the purpose of dental identification, HIPPA as it applies to medical examiners and coroners and the importance of surrendering original dental radiographs. Suggested standardization of release forms will also be presented

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by defining the elements of a request for dental records, emphasize the necessity and value of having original radiographs during the identification process, and explain the HIPPA exemption as it applies to medical examiners and coroners. By standardizing the request for records, the identification process will be completed in a more timely fashion and closure brought to the family of the decedent.

Obtaining adequate and complete dental information is essential to the dental identification process. In an attempt to facilitate identification of the decedent, individuals not familiar with forensic odontology and the comparison techniques, which are involved in the identification process, often initiate the request for records. Such individuals may include well-intentioned law enforcement officers or inexperienced office staff. A clear understanding of the required records on the part of the individual making the request, the individual obtaining the records and the dentist surrendering the records should be a well-defined, coordinated effort. Lack of such an effort can significantly delay the identification process and subsequent release of remains to the victim's family or loved ones.

The treating dentist should understand that a request for records is not a threatening act.

Comprehensive collection of dental clinical information hastens the identification process, thus bringing closure for the family. Records to be requested should be in a checklist format and include the following: all bitewing radiographs; all periapical radiographs; all panoramic radiographs, and any other radiographs such as cephalometric or T-M joint studies. The need for original radiographs must be stressed, since loss of resolution during the duplication process may preclude a successful identification. All radiographs should be labeled with the patient's name, date taken and dentist's name. Dental models should be obtained if available. Written records should include intake information, noting demographics and insurance information. The medical history obtained should include the name and address of the patient's primary care physician, as well as, any hospitalizations or medical referrals. Clinical records should include odontogram charting, clinical progress notes, and any dental referrals or previous treatment to include the contact information for each practitioner.

HIPPA regulations went into effect in April 2003. This statute created a great deal of confusion among dental and medical practitioners regarding release of records. Treating dentists should be presented with the applicable section of the HIPPA statute that permits the release of records to medical examiners and coroners for the purpose of identification and/or determining the cause of death (164.512 (g)). The treating dentist should retain both the request for records and the HIPPA exemption.

Complete contact information of the treating dentist should be obtained with the records. This should include full name, office address, office phone number, home phone number, mobile and pager numbers, as well as, E-mail addresses. This allows for contact during the identification process, should the need arise and also provides information necessary for the return of records once the identification process is completed.

Many dentists are reluctant to surrender original records when requested to do so. Having a clear understanding of the reasoning behind this request, along with the assurance that the records will be returned, greatly facilitates the overall process. This in turn benefits the family of the decedent and helps to bring closure to the loss of a loved one.

Forensic Dental Identification, Required Records, HIPPA