



D10 A Further Attempt to Identify the Unidentified: The Resolve Initiative

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After attending this presentation, attendees will gain an understanding of the process for establishing a website to assist with identifying decedents where other methods have proven unsuccessful. The attendee will also gain an understanding of the value of using the internet for these difficult identification cases.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by increasing appreciation of how a website can assist with identifying bodies and remains where other methods have failed. The forensic community will also better understand how information can be provided on a public website in a sensitive and respectful manner.

The Office of the Chief Coroner (OCC) Ontario and the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) unveiled a new website in May 2006 in an effort to help resolve cases of unidentified bodies/remains. This new website, accessed through www.opp.ca and entitled "THE RESOLVE INITIATIVE," contains information about both missing persons reported to the OPP (in which foul play cannot be ruled out), as well as unidentified bodies/remains cases, for the Province of Ontario (population 12 million).

Since 1975, there have been more than 150 cases in Ontario where, despite all efforts, the OCC has been unable to identify bodies or human remains. When more traditional methods have failed, some other jurisdictions have recently started to provide information on the internet, as one additional strategy to help identify these cases. The use of the internet has proven to be very effective, in large part due to the fact that the internet is widely used, available 24/7 and truly is "worldwide" – not limited to a province, state, country or even a continent.

Cases are included on the website when a decision has been made that other more traditional methods of identification have failed. Basic descriptive information is provided on all cases. Images are also presented when it has been determined that they may assist with identification. Where available, there are images of characteristic clothing, tattoos, or jewelry. In approximately 20% of cases, there are touched up photographs of the face taken at the time of autopsy. In ten cases of skeletal remains or badly decomposed bodies, there are artists' reconstructions, arising from cases where photographs are not helpful or inappropriate. In each and every case, significant efforts have been undertaken to ensure that the information and images are presented with sensitivity, out of respect for the deceased persons, their families and friends, and the public at large.

The goal of this new initiative is to provide the best information available on a public website, in as sensitive and respectful a manner as possible, to help identify persons when other methods have failed. During this presentation, four case scenarios will be highlighted from the website demonstrating the type of information that has been included. At the time of abstract submission, two cases have been identified as a direct result of this project.

Internet, Unidentified Bodies, Unidentified Remains