



## Odontology Section – 2007

### F24 Antemortem Records: Assistance From the Forensic Odontologist

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the importance of retrieving antemortem dental records.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by assisting the forensic odontologist in locating antemortem records in difficult situations. A team effort to locate valuable antemortem records for identification must include the forensic odontologist.

When the forensic odontologist is requested to identify an unknown victim, antemortem records must be available for comparison to the postmortem records. The obtaining of these antemortem records often requires the assistance of the forensic odontologist as to where they may be found.

Recent mass disasters such as World Trade Center II, American Airlines Flight 587, and the Katrina 2005 Hurricane have all demonstrated the difficulties in obtaining dental antemortem records. Where to find records, collection, and their usefulness for identification purposes all provided the forensic odontologist with a major role to assist medico-legal investigators, local and state police and governmental agencies for these tasks. Antemortem dental records of victims of the WTC II disaster have surfaced as many as four years after 9/11/2001. Antemortem dental records from unlicensed dentists who treated victims of AA Flight 587 were difficult to obtain. The destruction of dental facilities during the Katrina 2005 Hurricane made the recovery of the antemortem dental records a difficult task.

Forensic odontologists are faced in day-to-day operations at medical examiner's offices to make identifications and may often assist in the obtaining of sufficient antemortem data to complete the identification process.

In May 2006, a forensic odontologist was requested to do a postmortem examination on a victim found in a New Jersey river. Clinical examination revealed maxillary missing two central incisors, lost postmortem in the river and not recovered. One upper lateral incisor was missing antemortem. The significance of this situation could make a photographic dental identification difficult and more likely, not possible. Postmortem radiographs of the dentition revealed two teeth with root canal fillings, posts, and crowns; valuable information if the antemortem dental records are available. Photographs of the victim were taken by the medical examiner staff as well as a full head frontal X-Ray.

The mother of a 45-year-old male missing person was contacted by state police to provide information on where to locate dental records of her son. A dentist's name and telephone number was provided and given to the forensic odontologist. The possible victim's dentist was contacted and very cooperative with information on procedures he performed as well as recollection of the victim's dentition. However, this dentist had sold his practice to another dentist who when contacted stated that records over seven years old in his office were thrown away. Information was provided verbally by the dentist and was consistent with postmortem findings but hard evidence was lacking and identification could not be made at that time.

Communications between the Medical Examiner's Compliance Director and the forensic odontologist over the next three weeks eventually lead to the discovery of a head MRI series of radiographs including a lateral view showing teeth and a unique significant metal object in the orbit of the missing person. This same metal object was viewable on the postmortem frontal radiograph taken at the Medical Examiner's office.

The mother of a missing person supplied the name and location of a treating dentist, photographs of her son showing a smile that included the front upper teeth, and eventually supplied the information regarding an eye injury that ultimately was responsible for the identification of her son. The assistance of the forensic odontologist in locating antemortem records in difficult situations should not be overlooked. A team effort to locate valuable antemortem records for identification must include the forensic odontologist.

#### **Antemortem, Postmortem, Dental Records**