



### F2 Skill Assessment System to Facilitate Personnel Management of Forensic Odontologists at Mass Disasters Requiring Victim Identifications

Harry K. Zohn, DMD\*, 150 River Road, Building B, Suite 2B, Montville, NJ 07045; Sheila McFadden-Dashkow, DDS, 7675 Maple Avenue, Pennsauken, NJ 08109; Mitchell M. Kirschbaum, DDS, 223 West Main Street, Suite 4, Boonton, NJ 07005; Lawrence A. Dobrin, DMD, Chief Forensic Dentist, Office of the Chief Medical Examiner - New York City, 471 East Westfield Avenue, Roselle Park, NJ 07204; Kenneth W. Aschheim, DDS, 44 East 67th Street, New York, NY 10021; Howard S. Glazer, DDS, Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, 810 Abbott Boulevard, Suite 302, Fort Lee, NJ 07024; Daniel B. Levitt, DDS, 160-34 Willets Point Boulevard, Whitestone, NY 11357; and Cecile A. Feldman, DMD, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, New Jersey Dental School, 110 Bergen Street, Newark, NJ 07103

Upon completion of this presentation, participants will understand (1) the need for a shift or team captain's ability to quickly assess the skills of dentists seeking to assist in forensic odontology victim identification efforts, (2) a proposed system for classifying forensic odontology skills, (3) the potential for creating education partnerships between victim identification teams and dental schools, the American Society of Forensic Odontology and/or the American Academy of Forensic Sciences to administer an educational qualification program and (4) the importance of skill assessments in validating a dentist's ability to be educationally qualified as a member of an ID team.

During a mass disaster victim identification effort, there can be a need for a large number of dentists with forensic odontology skills. For example, during the World Trade Center identification effort, approximately 300 dentists participated. While participants needed to show completion of forensic odontology courses, these qualifications did not enable team captains to quickly or accurately determine a participant's experience, knowledge or skill level. The implementation of a Forensic Odontology Victim Identification Skill Assessment System will impact the forensic science community by facilitating this determination and enabling the most effective utilization of personnel in the time of a mass disaster victim identification effort.

The events of September 11, 2001 and Hurricane Katrina brought to American soil the horror of terrorism and natural mass disasters. These acts were of a proportion few imagined was possible. Hundreds of individuals provided time and expertise to address the forensic identification needs. Lessons learned from those experiences encountered during these disasters conclude that more comprehensive planning and training would make future responses more effective and efficient.

While there have been suggestions as to the content of forensic curricula, none of these proposals have suggested educational qualifications which would enable identification team captains to quickly and fully recognize the level of competence of a community dental practitioner or a non-board certified forensic odontologist presents with during a mass disaster identification emergency. Knowing the skill levels of dentists wishing to participate in large scale victim identification efforts could greatly assist individuals responsible for ensuring the efficiency and integrity of the victim identification process.

It should be noted that the proposed educational qualifications do not equate to board certification. Board certification by the American Board of Forensic Odontology requires proficiency and documented experience in victim identification, bite mark analysis, as well as expert testimony. The proposed framework only indicates that a dentist has completed educational programs and has successfully completed skill assessments in victim identification.

Four educational qualifications, each corresponding to one of the four teams normally organized in a mass disaster victim identification effort, would be required in order for an individual to be educationally qualified as a *Mass Disaster Victim Identification Forensic Odontologist*. These qualifications include: (1) Antemortem, (2) Postmortem, (3) Comparison, and (4) Shift Leader & Field Teams. An individual who is educationally qualified for all four teams will be educationally qualified as a *Mass Disaster Victim Identification Forensic Odontologist* when all four team sub-qualifications have been completed. Normally, Shift Leader & Field Team qualification would be the last qualification completed, with other team educational qualifications being achieved in any order.

By establishing four educational qualifications, dentists can participate based upon their skill level. Shift or team leaders would immediately know the skill level of dentists who have achieved various educational qualifications, thus minimizing time required to credential team participants in a mass disaster victim identification effort.

To facilitate training for individuals wishing to achieve such qualifications, dentists would be required to complete courses developed by dental schools, the American Society of Forensic Odontology or the American Academy of Forensic Sciences. Web based courses would enable dentists to rapidly receive some of this training in the event of a major emergency.

Educational qualifications would be based upon dentists passing skill assessment examinations. Dental schools, the American Society of Forensic Odontology and/or the American Academy of Forensic Sciences would develop and administer these skill assessments. Assessment mechanisms may include written examinations to confirm foundation knowledge as well as hands-on simulation examinations such as resecting maxilla and mandibular bones in a cadaver laboratory, taking photographs and radiographs in a cadaver laboratory, completing ante- and postmortem chartings and entering chart information into forensic identification software (including the



## Odontology Section – 2008

---

scanning of radiographs), and making victim identifications using victim identification software.

This presentation will also report the status of a novel partnership between the University of Medicine and New Jersey - New Jersey Dental School and the New Jersey Disaster Victim Identification Team (NJ-DVIT).

**Victim Identification, Educational Qualification, Forensic Odontology**