



F48 Mass Disaster Courses in Switzerland: Are They Necessary?

Michel Perrier, MS, DDS, and Patrice Mangin, MD, PhD, Institut Universitaire de Médecine Légale, av. de Rumine 7, Lausanne, 1005, SWITZERLAND*

The goal of this presentation is to present and discuss a model for basic training in odontology applied to the context of a mass disaster.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by describing mass disaster courses, their importance, and feed-back.

Education in the field of forensic odontology in Europe still suffers from disparities. Thus, the fact that there is no recognized specialization in this field may well create a serious problem in some future judiciary procedure. A recent thesis, published in France in 2006, describes the current status of forensic odontology training based on a survey of a number of dentists from different countries that all had some interest in the field. This publication shows that forensic odontology is usually taught towards the end of the University curriculum. In most countries, such teaching amounts to less than ten hours, with only three countries offering more than twenty hours (Norway, Italy, and Croatia). In all of the countries, teaching is purely theoretical as no practical training is offered. The study concludes that students receive an adequate introduction to forensic odontology only in Scandinavian countries and in Croatia. At the same time, professionals in Southern and Eastern Europe are well aware of the shortcomings in their educational offerings in this field.

The mass disaster courses in odontology organized in Lausanne, Switzerland have the following objectives:

A. Objectives for professionals

- Satisfy the need for undergraduate training,
- Satisfy the need for postgraduate training,
- Satisfy the need for continuing education.

B. Public interest objectives

- Improved readiness in the context of expanding mass transportation,
- Improved readiness in the context of an increased terrorist threat,
- Improved readiness in the context of an increasing number of conflictual situations, etc.

The courses are designed as an introduction to the essentials of odontological identification. On the one hand, the participants learn the basics of identification: the postmortem examination and the analysis of antemortem records (odontograms, x-ray data, photographs, etc). On the other hand, they also learn the key features of management of odontological identifications based on fragmentation and comingling in the context of a mass disaster.

As a continuing education program, these courses first organized in Switzerland in 2006, are unprecedented in the field of mass disaster management. Currently, they span only two days, as opposed to the usual four to five days offered by other institutions. In 2006 and 2007, the course program was sent to approximately 400 dentists in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. The courses were also advertised in the monthly Swiss Journal of Odontostomatology.

In each case, over 200 dentists responded but only 30 could enroll because of the limitations inherent to the organization of practical, hands- on exercises. The speakers and other staff (odontologists, forensic scientists, investigators) were appointed on the basis of their academic training, experience in the field of identification and teaching experience. All of the specialists had actively participated in the management of several mass disasters.

The first day of the course comprised an introduction to legal medicine, to forensic odontology and to the principles of odontological identification. This theoretical part was followed by a practical exercise of identification of human maxillaries carried out by teams of two participants.

During the second day of the course, the participants were introduced to mass disaster management. After a theoretical introduction, practical exercises were carried out to simulate a mass disaster scenario in which mixed fragments of human maxillaries had to be identified.

The activities and behavior of the participants as a whole group and within the teams were observed by the teaching staff that was present throughout the course.

Each participant received a written evaluation form aimed at assessing some general features of the course, such as overall organization and the usefulness and quality of the provided information. In addition, each participant was asked to define his or her motivation in attending this type of training. Last but not least, each participant had to assess his or her readiness to become involved in the management of a real mass disaster event on short notice and for an indefinite period of time. Every questionnaire distributed to the participants was returned to the organizers for thorough analysis.

The presentation consists in a critical assessment of the course organization, follow-up and the feedback that was received.

Odontology, Mass Disaster, Teaching