



E7 Familial DNA Searching: Why Isn't the United States Embracing It? Issues and Answers

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This presentation will discuss the legal, policy, and philosophical issues related to expanding the crime-solving capability of our DNA databases by adding familial DNA searching. It will also present and discuss methods being used in the United Kingdom and in California to solve more crimes. The presentations will demonstrate that there are no sound reasons for not adopting these techniques, legal, policy, or technical.

This presentation will impact the forensic community by connecting all components of the criminal justice system and will forge a greater understanding of the topic than currently exists. It will force the topic out in the open where it belongs, rather than as a secret topic within the closed forensic community where it has lingered for too long.

At a time when considerable effort is being made to expand individual states' DNA offender databases, there has been scant public discussion of increasing the efficiency of existing database searches by conducting familial DNA searching that produce investigative leads to help solve crimes. In fact, Maryland recently enacted a greatly expanded database law in which there was an agreement not to allow for familial DNA searching.

This presentation will consist of an expansive set of presentations from experts in various fields who have been leading the effort to add familial DNA searching to individual states' crime-solving capabilities.

The presentations will include a representative from the United Kingdom who will discuss their scientific, policy, and investigative approach to familial searching that has been successful in about 10-15% of the cases in which it has been employed.

There will be a presentation from an experienced defense attorney who has voiced legal and policy concerns about familial DNA searching constituting lifetime "genetic surveillance" with a strong element of racial discrimination.

A presentation will be made by noted researcher Dr. Fred Bieber. Fred has written and lectured extensively on the subject. Fred will discuss the likelihood that brothers are present in offender databases, and general statistical approaches that will help identify closely matching DNA profiles as being from sibling pairs or father/son combinations.

A presentation from the Denver District Attorney, Mitch Morrissey and the Denver Police Department Lab Director, Gregg Laberge is also planned. Their presentation will include an analysis of familial DNA searches done using a local database and the contribution the searches had on solving crimes. There may also be a discussion about familial DNA searching research being done on the state level in Colorado.

California is the first state to have formally developed and adopted a policy and practice for conducting familial DNA searches in an effort to solve crimes. Gary Sims, from the California Department of Justice heads that program. He will discuss the technical and statistical issues inherent in the approach and will explain how his agency will implement them and apply them to assist law enforcement in solving cold cases.

There will be a presentation by San Diego Superior Court Judge George "Woody" Clarke concerning his opinion about legal, technical, or policy objections raised during the workshop or elsewhere

Finally there will be a presentation by recently retired prosecutor Rockne Harmon summarizing the presentations and discussing why this subject is not exclusively a laboratory decision and that it must be discussed and decided among the greater law enforcement community.

DNA, Investigative Lead, Database Search