



F2 Ethics in Forensic Dentistry

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand some of the rules and principles of general and medical ethics. Attendees will be able to apply this knowledge to cases in forensic dentistry.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by enhancing awareness of ethical issues in actual cases and offering techniques to resolve ethical conflicts.

Ethics is the process of determining right and wrong conduct. Three common approaches to decision making in bioethics are: (1) Principlism, (2) Moral Rules, and (3) Casuistry. Not only can a disciplined ethics analysis help to distinguish right action from wrong action in difficult cases, but it also provides a basis to understand *why* one action is morally preferable to another.

Ethical issues usually arise when one's own interests come into conflict with the interests of others. In forensic dentistry there are instances where ethics and law may conflict. One has a prima facie ethical obligation to obey the law, but arguably a greater obligation to do the morally correct thing. A legal resolution is not necessarily ethically justified, nor is an ethical resolution necessarily legally permissible. Ethics considers obeying the law a prima facie obligation, while law attempts to achieve ethical harmony.

Forensic dentistry includes but is not limited to bite mark analysis, dental autopsy, expert witness, and mass disaster disciplines. When testifying as an expert witness one should not be concerned about the legal or social outcome of a trial, but rather only about providing truthful, informative testimony. In bite mark analysis as well as in the other areas of forensic dentistry, the dentist must strive to be impartial. In order to eliminate bias, many professionals believe that a dentist should either collect or interpret the evidence but not do both on the same case. Others claim that a competent forensic dentist would not have a conflict of interest in performing both tasks.

Ethical analysis should be initiated when ethical principles or rules are in conflict. Cultural beliefs and customs must be taken into consideration in making ethical choices, but this does not mean that because a particular culture accepts a particular action, it is morally correct.

Each expert should have the knowledge to analyze his or her case and arrive at a justifiable outcome. This presentation will illustrate several methods of ethical analysis and describe how to apply them to specific cases.

Three cases will be presented and each analyzed and analyze each in the methods described. By the end of the presentation, each attendee should have the tools necessary to conduct an appropriate ethical evaluation of any case that requires it.

Ethics, Forensic Odontology, Dental Case Studies