



Odontology Section – 2010

F3 Glitches, Faux Pas, and Gaffs: A Case Evaluation

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After attending this presentation, attendees will have a better understanding of how to avoid errors in case presentation, testimony, and report writing.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by fostering increased credibility both within the forensic community and the legal system.

The paths of traditional science, forensic science, and the law are on a convergence path for change. The comparative sciences of fingerprints, handwriting, fibers, tool marks, tidemarks, and bite marks are being looked at as being “plausible, under researched, and oversold”. The science of definitive individual uniqueness is being challenged in the courts and within the individual forensic subspecialties as well. Questions remain - Is traditional science methodology the appropriate standard for measurement of forensic science? Is the gold standard of DNA type of analysis appropriate for all forensic analysis? Are forensic scientists overselling their science?

The recent National Academy of Sciences Report commented on the shortcomings of various forensic science disciplines. The report has valid issues and recommendations. However, special interest groups will use the report to discredit various of forensic science disciplines as “junk science.” Forensic odontology, in particular bite mark analysis, has been repudiated recently with DNA exonerations of incarcerated individuals as a result of faulty bite mark testimony. Charges of tampering with evidence, unscientific procedures, false reports, even outright lying taint the integrity of the cases. Is the problem with the science, the scientist, or both? As forensic scientists, there is a need to be acutely aware of the pitfalls and ramifications of our actions and opinions.

Forensic dental cases will be presented that demonstrate problems that can occur with report writing, court presentation, and examination procedures. Reviewing cases that presented challenges allows us to anticipate and avoid problems. Using appropriate systematic, consistent protocols is essential and attainable for a problem free case. Examination of mistakes, misinterpretations, and oversights prepares us for future cases. Among the cases presented will be misidentification, photographic errors, mistakes in the Medical Examiner office, errors in judgment, falsification of evidence, and more. Mistakes can be accidental and then there are those made by arrogance and enhanced self-importance.

The objective of this presentation is to learn how to avoid problems in identification and bite mark cases by reviewing errors in existing cases.

Forensic Odontology, Forensic Errors, Bite Mark Errors