



Pathology Biology Section – 2010

G64 A Uniform Protocol to Address the Rapidly Accumulating Unidentified Human Remains and Missing Persons in the United States — A Nation's Silent Mass Disaster

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the problems involved with the investigation of unidentified human remains (UHR). The strengths and limitations of current technologies and resources available for investigating UHR cases will be discussed as well as presenting for the first time, a uniform protocol and procedures for the identification of UHR.

The presentation of this protocol will impact the forensic science community by serving as a guideline as it can expedite and augment UHR identification efforts by presenting the resources available in an organized and consistent format. As a direct result, utilization of this protocol may help identify the tens of thousands of UHR that are currently being held within medical examiner/coroner's (ME/C) offices throughout the United States. More importantly, families of these deceased individuals will no longer wonder what happened to their loved ones and struggle with the agony of possibly never having the ability of laying their loved ones to rest.

Statistical data from UHR cases at the San Diego County Medical Examiner's Office (SDMEO) from 1997-2007 will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating the effectiveness of this new protocol.

No uniform protocol or procedure exists describing every avenue currently available to facilitate the identification of UHR. Therefore, many jurisdictions lack consistent guidelines for pursuing the identification of UHR and continue to be unaware of the most current resources available to aid in their investigations. This study was conducted to determine whether a uniform protocol could be developed to aid in streamlining the process of identification. Many avenues currently available to aid in the identification of UHR were examined and combined to create a comprehensive and universal procedure that can be followed by any agency or organization in the forensic science community tasked with the identification of unidentified persons.

During a brief time period from January 2007 to January 2008, when components of the uniform protocol were used for the investigation of specific UHR cases at the San Diego County Medical Examiner's Office (SDMEO), there were seventeen "cold" UHR cases from the 1997-2007 time period that were identified. Furthermore, there were only four UHR cases recorded in 2007, a significant decrease from the average number of fourteen UHR cases per year. An obvious decline in the number of unidentified persons was yielded, which correlated to the utilization of components of the uniform protocol.

A uniform protocol as will be presented can be created to assist in the identification of current and "cold case" UHR and linking them to missing person cases, which can further assist law enforcement in any related criminal investigations.

Collaboration and organized, consistent protocols among local, state, and federal agencies tasked with the identification of missing and unidentified persons will expedite the collection and distribution of information crucial to these investigations. Thus, a consistency of incoming information will be established, allowing the searching and correlating of case information and as a result, increasing the probability of UHR cases being linked to missing person cases. This will likely result saving millions of dollars and countless hours of time that could be used more efficiently by the agencies involved with the identification of UHR.

Specific resources and supporting data for the application of the uniform protocol in ME/C offices in the United States will be presented. It is recommended that ME/C offices and agencies tasked with the identification of UHR become familiar with the various UHR identification avenues available that the protocol will exhibit. **Unidentified Human Remains, Missing Persons, Investigation**