E20   No Hit Left Behind: Getting the Most Out of CODIS

Melissa Mourges, JD*, and Martha Bashford, JD*, District Attorney's Office, New York County, One Hogan Place, New York, NY 10013; and Noelle J. Umback, PhD*, Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Department of Forensic Biology, 421 East 26th Street, New York, NY 10016

After attending this presentation, attendees will understand how use of a NYC-developed email system for the distribution of information about combined DNA idex system (CODIS) hits can prevent match information from falling through the cracks.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by illustrating deficiencies in most notification systems, where only police agencies get notified of a CODIS match, and where many DNA matches are not acted upon.

Many CODIS matches occur months or even years after the crime scene samples are uploaded into the forensic index. Many public labs routinely send notifications of these matches back to the police officer or detective who originally submitted the evidence. Unfortunately, detectives retire or get transferred, and often the notification sits in a fax machine, tossed into the "circular file" or thrown unread into the original case folder, never to be seen again. Many matches are therefore not acted upon. This creates several serious problems. One is that perpetrators who should be charged with crimes remain free to commit new ones. Second, some CODIS matches serve to exonerate the convicted. Third, in some states, legislators who learn that hits remain uninvestigated are reluctant to budget money for DNA labs or to expand DNA databanks.

To battle this problem, the mayor's Criminal Justice Coordinator in New York City decided to develop a notification system that would accomplish several tasks: notify police and prosecutors simultaneously of DNA matches; eliminate the use of fax machines that could malfunction; and create a system where all stakeholders could view and update information. The result is "DNA Hits", an email system that notifies police and prosecutors simultaneously of DNA matches that occur in the local, state, and national CODIS database. The system, which went online in 2006, also has a "create reports" function to make statistics readily accessible. This is vital in tracking outcomes for policymakers and for grant purposes.

Observe a "real time" notification, which comes in via email to participants' smart phones. The actual information about the match is on a secure database where police agencies, prosecutors, and the OCME all have access. On the opening screen, the database provides the following information: lab case number, convicted offender swab ID number, victim's name, date of crime, police report and precinct number, evidence type, perpetrator name, criminal ID number, and whether he was a named suspect at the time of testing. Any particular "hit" can be opened to reveal the name of the criminalist, contact information in the case of out of state hits, and whatever additional updates prosecutors or police may add. Simultaneous notifications greatly reduce the chance that a DNA match will fall through the cracks and ensures public safety.

CODIS, Matches, Simultaneous Notification