



### **F10 Disaster Victim Identification (Dental) Following the Christchurch Earthquake in February 2011**

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After attending this presentation, attendees will gain a brief overview of the devastating magnitude 6.3 earthquake in New Zealand, on February 22, 2011, which shook the city of Christchurch to its core, causing death and destruction. Attendees will gain understanding of the successes and difficulties with identification (focusing on dental identification) encountered following this mass fatality incident that claimed the lives of 181 people and injured many more.

This presentation aims to give a brief overview of the disaster and to share with the attendees the difficulties and successes encountered with the dental identifications. It will show the problems facing Christchurch for the future and the importance of having Disaster Victim Identification response plans and personnel in place to respond rapidly and effectively.

This years Academy theme is based around the global reach of the forensic sciences. Odontology's contribution to international forensic efforts is never clearer than when forensic dentists work in teams to assist the identification of victims of mass fatality events. While personnel may be local to the disaster, there are many instances when international assistance is gained. Irrespective of the nationality of forensic dentists, all are influenced by the development of standards, protocols, and IT systems that have been developed and enhanced through the efforts of those attending previous DVIs. Indeed, this interactive process of development is essential – some good must come from these devastating events.

Within a few moments Christchurch would be reduced to rubble with hundreds of aftershocks during the following months causing further distress and damage. The emotional, structural, and financial devastation will leave its mark on New Zealand for years to come. The collapse of the Canterbury Television Building and subsequent fire would claim the most lives - mainly young people and many from other countries.

New Zealand declared a state of national emergency and teams rapidly deployed to assist in whatever way they could. Recovery teams began the grim task of locating and transportation of the deceased. A temporary mortuary was established at Burnham Military Camp in preparation for the postmortem gathering of information and relatives were approached for antemortem information. The different forensic disciplines worked long hours to establish identification of the victims.

Despite incineration, co-mingling, and trauma of the remains, forensic odontology would prove to be a useful identification method alongside fingerprints and DNA. To date only four persons have not been identified, but the work goes on to return every victim to their families. A devastated city fights to return to a semblance of order from the chaos of that ill-fated morning earlier this year.

**Disaster Victim Identification (Dental), Christchurch Earthquake, February 2011**