H55   **The Importance of Proper Data Management: General Considerations and Grassroots Implementation in Guatemala**

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The goal of this presentation is to increase awareness in the forensic science community on issues related to proper management of data on missing persons following armed conflicts. Implementation of a data management strategy in Guatemala is used as a case example.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by broadening perspectives on data management for practitioners working with large numbers of missing persons and human remains, particularly in situations of violations of international law.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is a neutral, impartial, independent humanitarian organization that provides protection and assistance to victims of armed conflicts, other situations of violence and catastrophes. The ICRC Forensic Department participates in activities worldwide related to the promotion of scientific best practices on the management of human remains and identification of the dead, in contexts such as Central and South America, the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East.

Proper data management involves the organized collection, handling, archiving and analysis of data, recognizing issues of chain-of-custody, data protection and confidentiality, access rights, etc. In situations involving large numbers of missing persons and unidentified remains, proper data management is integral to any strategy to identify human remains and fulfil families' right to know the fate of their missing loved ones. Data management can be enhanced with a centralized database in which to process varying types of data. Therefore, the ICRC developed the Antemortem/Posmortem Information Management Tool (AM/PM), an electronic database application, which is freely distributed to authorities, forensic practitioners and other parties involved in the management of data on missing persons. The AM/PM includes modules for multiple types of data (AMD, PMD, Events, Field data, etc.) as well as tools for analysis of that data.

During the 1960-1996 internal conflict in Guatemala, approximately 40,000 individuals went missing, the majority belonging to one of the indigenous Mayan ethnic groups. To date there is no centralized missing persons register, and it is difficult to estimate the actual number of persons missing from the conflict. Dozens of NGO's have developed following the conflict, many of them devoted to the issue of missing persons. These NGO's range from professional human rights organizations offering legal and counselling services for families of missing persons, to scientific NGO's recovering and analyzing remains and small grassroots associations of families of missing persons. These organizations possess a wealth of information on missing persons in varying degrees of detail, quality, and format. However, this information is difficult to access and in danger of loss as it is stored mainly in old paper files in unsecured offices. In addition, a lack of standardized format and terminology has hindered efforts to exchange and consolidate the information between the various organizations.

In order to help organize, archive, update and consolidate the existing dispersed information, in 2010 the ICRC began a data consolidation project with 15 Guatemalan NGO's. The first phase of this project aimed at organizing the individual archives and digitizing them in a standardized format. For this purpose, the ICRC provided the AM/PM database, together with intensive training and coaching, and facilitated discussions on standardization of terminology and data entry. As a result, a consensus on national data entry standards has been developed, and the various organizations now have compatible digital archives of missing persons' information. The large number of organizations involved, their varying degree of organizational and educational levels, and very limited resources have posed challenges to the project. In addition, the need for clear and enforced data entry Standard Operation Procedures became evident early on and thus were integrated into the project. The second phase will focus on data cleaning and consolidation among the institutions in order to reach a consolidated list of missing persons for Guatemala. Such a list will enable authorities and NGOs' to access all the necessary available information and better focus their investigations.

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