



### **F24 What Are We Accomplishing With Dental Information? Obstacles Facing Forensic Odontologists and Working Solutions**

*Donna A. Fontana, MS, NJ State Police, Office of Forensic Sciences, 1200 Negron Dr, Hamilton, NJ 08691; Stuart E. Alexander, DMD\*, 19 N Main St, Cranbury, NJ 08512; and Sheila Dashkow, DDS, 7675 Maple Ave, Pennsauken, NJ 08109*

After attending this presentation, attendees will be able to understand the importance of a multidisciplinary approach to entering dental information into national databases, such as the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) and the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs). Additionally, attendees will be able to understand the obstacles encountered and the solutions needed in the process of ensuring accurate dental coding.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by emphasizing the importance of working with law enforcement, medical examiners/coroners, and forensic odontologists. In this way, forensic odontologists will be able to acquire, evaluate, interpret, and code missing and unidentified person's cases. Furthermore, through NamUs, families of missing persons are now aware that vital information of their loved ones is available in national databases, providing hope for future identification. It is not uncommon for potential matches to be made through the information provided by family members who routinely search the Internet. For this reason, it is vital that a protocol be provided that will ensure that the dental information is accurately entered into the appropriate databases in hopes of securing a positive identification.

The initial phase of this initiative concentrated on the NCIC dental coding entries and their inaccuracies. In identifying this problem, protocols were phased in to correct coding and thus ensure dental accuracy in NCIC. The initiative obtained original dental records and radiographs, provided coding review by experienced forensic odontologists, and digitized dental radiographs.

The second phase of this initiative now encompasses over 200 cases entered in both NCIC and NamUs. Observations and experiences since the initial phase have called for modifications and streamlining of protocols due to the prevalence of miscoded dental data. The accuracy of New Jersey's dental information has greatly improved in NCIC and NamUs since the inception of this initiative which can better assist in additional positive identifications; however, challenges remain. There have been many obstacles that have been encountered in continuing this initiative. These include the lack of reviews by more than one experienced forensic odontologist when coding missing and unidentified persons, the recognition that family dentists are unfamiliar with the different database codes, thus providing inaccurate dental information, and the awareness that law enforcement working missing person cases rely on the information provided by the family dentist. These and other obstacles will be discussed. Ensuring accuracy is still of paramount importance to this initiative in order to provide an avenue for positive identification.

By identifying these obstacles during this second phase, there is currently a concentration on creating training models in dental coding to forensic odontologists, education models for the law enforcement community, and on networking with families and family dentists. Solutions to these challenges such as access to additional training and more experience and familiarity with the coding systems for missing and unidentified persons will also be discussed. This presentation will discuss the information learned throughout this second phase. It is anticipated that the obstacles and possible solutions presented in this presentation would help to assist other jurisdictions in the productive management of dental information into our national databases. This can only improve the identification of unidentified persons in this country and around the world. An overall update on the current status of this initiative will be presented.

**Dental Information, NCIC, NamUs**