E30   Putting the Heat on Cold Cases: How to Identify and Evaluate Cold Cases — A Collaborative Approach

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After attending this presentation, attendees will learn how new DNA testing methods and grant funding enabled prosecutors to review hundreds of old unsolved homicides and the challenges encountered by law enforcement, district attorney's offices, and the forensic laboratory during this process.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by illustrating how to identify and evaluate potential cold cases for review and testing.

This presentation will help attendees learn how after receiving a National Institute of Justice (NIJ) Cold Case grant in 2010, Bronx County prosecutors were able to evaluate and review hundreds of cold case homicides looking for potential probative crime scene evidence to submit to the forensic biology laboratory for DNA testing. The team of prosecutors and detectives developed guidelines for case selection and prioritization criteria to ensure the greatest likelihood of a DNA match and eventual prosecution. Such criteria helped investigators whittle down a potential pool of more than a thousand unsolved cases to a more manageable number.

The grant team has reviewed over a hundred files pertaining to unsolved homicides which occurred between 1990 and 2000. Specifically, the Bronx County prosecutors concentrated on *close contact* homicides involving strangulation, stabbings, or physical assaults which would yield the greatest chance of finding biological material suitable for forensic analysis and which would allow prosecutors to pursue new potential leads.

Prosecutors created an electronic database designed to organize all the police paperwork, forensic files, and photographs associated with the case. This allowed the prosecutors to track the progress of the grant, as well as easily find case documents when needed. Investigators from Bronx Homicide Task Force and The NYPD Cold Case Squad reinterviewed witnesses and researched possible suspects.

This presentation will also document some of the legal obstacles involved when working on these types of cold cases including locating witnesses, tracking down original files and police paperwork, and ultimately hunting down crime scene evidence which has been stored in police department warehouses for years, sometimes decades. Locating evidence has proven to be the largest hurdle following Hurricane Sandy in October 2012 which devastated parts of the New York region and resulted in the severe flooding of several New York City Police Department property warehouses.

Work conducted under this Cold Case grant has yielded some exciting results. In one such unsolved case, the Bronx County team requested that NYC Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Forensic Biology laboratory retest the intimate body swabs from a 1998 cold case homicide that was included in a larger sexual assault pattern in Bronx County. Prior DNA testing revealed a partial male DNA profile, but technology at the time was not sensitive enough to develop a full profile suitable for inclusion in CODIS. Retesting of the swab using advanced, more sensitive technology was successful and a full male DNA profile was developed and uploaded to the New York State DNA Databank. Within months, the Bronx County District Attorney (BXDA) was notified of a forensic match between the male DNA profile from the postmortem sexual assault evidence kit and a convicted offender whose DNA profile was already on file from a prior DNA-qualifying conviction. This investigatory lead was thoroughly explored, including interviewing old witnesses and collecting police/OCME paperwork associated with the case. The identified suspect was eventually arrested and indicted on Second Degree Murder charges in March 2012. This success story illustrates the incredible impact that such projects can have and the potential for solving many more difficult, unsolved cases in the future.

DNA, Law Enforcement, Cold Case