



Jurisprudence Section - 2014

F13 True Crime Stories: Odontology and Murder

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After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand some of the principles involved in identification of non-viewable remains.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by offering insight into the methodology and sequencing of investigations to successfully resolve a dramatic crime.

This presentation discusses the role of the odontologist in the investigation of a homicide. Frequently, an odontologist is called upon to make an identification of remains that may be part of a murder investigation. After a medical examiner's ruling of homicide, it is critical that an accurate and provable identification is made. The first thing a good defense attorney would do for his accused client would be to question the identity of the deceased person. The odontologist is employed to demonstrate the identity when other methods such as DNA or fingerprints are not possible or impractical.

Two cases will be presented that demonstrate the need for accurate and timely identification as part of the investigative process. Background information on the victims as well as outcome will be described. The first case involves a middle-aged woman who had an unstable relationship with her boyfriend. A neighbor witnessed an argument between the two of them which resulted in a kidnapping. The boyfriend also kidnapped a friend who tried to intervene on her behalf. He later let the friend escape, but drove across state lines and eventually beat and murdered his former girlfriend. Although charged with her murder, the prosecutors had no body as the trial date approached. A deal was struck which revealed the location of her remains. While controversial, this deal-making helped expedite the resolution of this case. The second case involves a murder, but at the time of this writing, nobody has been charged. These are relatively high-profile cases that were reported in the media for several weeks. It was through the tireless efforts of investigators that eventually led to the location of one victim. An unusual radiographic method was employed in this case, and it was fortunate that the dental evidence, though scant, was very strong. A confounding factor will be discussed.

It is hoped that this presentation will impact the forensic community by highlighting methods used to make a positive identification and a prosecutorial method that expedited resolution. When evidence is minimal, every effort must be used to make the best of it.

Homicide, Police Investigation, Radiography