



### F16 An Identification Case Where Social Media Provided Evidence for Dental Comparison

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand that when developing an opinion for submission to a medical examiner (ME)/coroner, the forensic odontologist will compare postmortem data to identified antemortem records. When the antemortem record is limited or absent, the odontologist has the best understanding of what can be valuable material to develop an antemortem dental profile. The odontologist can become part of the investigative team offering aid and support to law enforcement and the ME/coroner.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by showing how an odontologist can assist in the development of a missing person profile before the discovery of remains and the comparison for identification. Collected progress notes, models, radiographs, photographs, odontograms, whitening trays, retainers, and insurance Explanation of Benefits (EOBs) are some items that provide antemortem dental information. Analysis of this material is done to develop, as completely as possible, an antemortem profile of the missing person. Scientific methodology can only be enhanced with increased availability of data. Sources of data may be family, friends of the missing person, health care providers, law enforcement, the ME/coroner, etc. Social media has become a vehicle for networking and a public database. This public display of names, places, dates, and images carries inherent privacy risks but, in this identification case, researching the family's use of social media provided unintended benefits toward identification of their lost family member.

**Synopsis:** A missing person was reported. Limited antemortem reference material was available from health care providers to develop an antemortem dental profile for inclusion in a National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database for potential dental comparison. An online search of sites which included the missing person's name, provided several sites of news sources and a notation of a Facebook® posting. Linking to the Facebook® site, a posted string by family included several photos of the missing person. The photos were posted as memorial images without consideration that the images could have forensic value. One image posted long before the individual was reported as missing was distinctive from the other images by its dental detail. Law enforcement was notified. When remains were eventually found, digital images of the remains (postmortem digital photographs of the dentition) were captured in the field and digitally forwarded for comparison to the photographic image posted on Facebook® and the available antemortem radiographs. The single antemortem photograph eventually became a valuable comparison element contributing to a written report opining a positive dental identification. This scientific method of identification enhances and documents the confidence level of identification over less-scientific means of identification such as personal effects and association.

**Conclusion:** The public's participation and utilization of social media may provide valuable forensic data that the lay person does not appreciate as having scientific value. Scientific opinions are better formed when every source of information is explored and that information is then considered.

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#### **Forensic Odontology, Identification, Forensic Anthropology**