



Odontology Section - 2015

G49 A New 12-Month, University-Based United States Fellowship Program in Forensic Odontology

Richard A. Weems, DMD, MS, 592 Oakline Drive, Birmingham, AL 35226; Lee Wilson, DMD, UT Med Center Knoxville, Dept of General Dentistry, Medical Bldg A, Ste 340, 1930 Alcoa Highway, Knoxville, TN 37920; Michael P. Tabor, DDS, 310 23rd Avenue, N, Nashville, TN 37203; William M. Bass III, PhD, University of Tennessee, Dept of Anthropology, Knoxville, TN 37996; Darinka Mileusnic-Polchan, MD, PhD, UTMCK, Dept of Pathology, 1924 Alcoa Highway, Knoxville, TN 37920; and Murray K. Marks, PhD, University of Tennessee, Dept of Pathology, 1924 Alcoa Highway, Box 108, Knoxville, TN 37920*

After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand traditional forensic odontological education in the United States and how a new full-time odontology fellowship will offer a different model of training as related to curriculum design, student assessment techniques, and alignment/collaborations with other forensic-related institutions and agencies.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by enhancing attendees' abilities to critique and develop unique and evolving educational programs in forensic odontology.

Currently, obtaining training and required qualifications in forensic odontology in the United States is gained through a relatively few program opportunities, none of which are full-time/continual in nature. During the 1970s, acquiring odontology skill sets was basically limited to two options: (1) identifying an experienced, credentialed, and willing forensic odontologist to serve as a mentor; or, (2) participation in the week-long forensic odontology course sponsored by the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (AFIP).

The mentorship model was often hit or miss in that locating such a willing *and* experienced individual was often difficult. Also, most forensic organizations now require that applicants for full membership and/or credentialing submit a more formal and organized curriculum conducted by a recognized and credentialed faculty. The weight or validity of the training course is also increased based on the topics and the amount of hands-on experiences conducted by the faculty.

Unfortunately, the AFIP course is currently unavailable due to governmental budget restraints and has an uncertain future. The loss of this traditional opportunity has created concern among many regarding the long-term need to create a cadre of highly-trained and competent forensic odontologists for the future.

Recently, there has been modest growth in training opportunities through the development of other excellent forensic odontology courses, though many are held biennially. These are typically affiliated with a medical examiner's office or university-sponsored programs which confer credibility. These programs range from three to six continual days to a robust "fellowship" program consisting of eight to nine onsite sessions lasting three to four days over a 22-month period. These programs are continuously evaluated by the Odontology Section of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences to judge each course's value in achieving "full membership" status in the Academy.

Recently, an advisory committee was formed in the Department of General Dentistry at the University of Tennessee Medical Center to explore the possibility of creating a new forensic odontology training program and graduate curricula. The committee included the Chair of the Department of General Dentistry, two board-certified forensic odontologists, two board-certified forensic anthropologists, the Dean of the University of Tennessee Medical Center's Graduate School of Medicine, and the Chief Medical Examiner of the Knox County Regional Forensic Center.

Consequently, a new program in forensic odontology has been developed and includes all of the forensic scientists mentioned above as faculty. It is based within the newly created Division of Forensic Odontology/Human Identification in the Department of General Dentistry at the University of Tennessee Medical Center's Graduate School of Medicine. The program duration is 9 to 12 months of continual graduate training involving case-based didactic lectures, demonstrations and hands-on exercises in the areas of dental identification, disaster victim identification protocol, bitemark analysis, human age/sex/ancestry estimation, and jurisprudence. A significant amount of the practical component of the residents' experience involves real-time casework through a collaborative effort with the aforementioned Forensic Center which serves approximately 20 counties in East Tennessee. A cooperative research alliance has also been created with the University of Tennessee's National Forensic Academy's Outdoor Research Facility in Oak Ridge, TN.

The Fellows' foundational knowledge and specific skillsets will be continually assessed through literature review presentations, specific procedural competencies, high stakes hands-on examinations, and a continuing portfolio of the residents' actual forensic casework. A project of original odontological research with national forensic meeting presentation and eventual publication will complete the training.

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The first Fellow matriculated on August 1, 2014.

Forensic Odontology, Odontology Training, Case-Based Training