



Odontology Section - 2016

G29 Unusual Bitemark Cases Demonstrate the Value of Bitemark Analysis

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After attending this presentation, attendees will see the value of bitemark analysis in cases not linked to capital crimes. Attendees will be presented with casework with valid opinions based on the American Board of Forensic Odontology (ABFO) guidelines. Attendees will hopefully see the positive outcomes derived from rational analysis.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by showing the value of bitemark analysis in atypical cases that were presented for analysis.

Several bitemark or alleged bitemark cases will be featured. The investigator is not always asked to compare an injury with a suspected dentition in order to include or exclude a suspect. Even limited information can assist law enforcement and attorneys with the case.

Case 1 — *He Said, She Said*: An alleged bite injury was under investigation. The odontologist testified for the prosecution in the first trial and for the defense in the second. The victim alleged the suspect bit her during an assault. The initial opinion was that the injury could not be absolutely ruled out as a bite. The opinion at the second trial was that the injury was such that meaningful comparison was not possible.

Case 2—*It's a Love Bite!*: An attorney asked if an injury could be differentiated as an amorous consensual bite or an assault as alleged by the victim.

Case 3—*Can you see any bites?*: Photos were submitted by the prosecutor to ascertain if any bites were evident. An 8-year-old child described a biting game with the mother's partner.

Case—*Oops!*: A possible domestic violence incident presents with an unusual bite injury. Police were called to a dispute. The husband stated that he often nibbled the wife's lip during kissing. As he kissed her, she pushed him away, causing an injury. The wife experienced copious bleeding, and the husband was arrested for assault.

Case 5—*Dog ear*: Who bit the ear — the owner or the best four-footed friend? An officer was called to an apartment residence by a person alleging that the neighbors were abusing their dog. The neighbors stated that the dog had gotten into the garbage and was upset about being placed in the shower. The dog had a cut on its ear and the investigating officer reported some blood in the shower. While discussing the ear injury, the owners mentioned how their grandfather used to bite his dog's ear to assert dominance. The case went to trial on third-degree animal abuse charges. The odontologist was asked for an opinion on whether the bite was human or animal.

Case 6—*How much evidence?*: Photos were reviewed to provide an opinion as to whether an injury was worthy of further study. On examination, it was difficult to determine maxillary from mandibular arches; however, some malalignment of teeth was evident, which may have been useful for including or excluding the suspect. The ABFO decision tree advised that no further workup was pursued, in spite of what the odontologist observed.

Discussion: These bitemark cases demonstrate the value and challenges of analyzing suspected bitemark evidence. A brief discussion will discuss "junk science" assertions against forensic odontology and the call for the "eradication" of bitemark testimony.

Bitemarks, Animal Abuse, Domestic Violence