



## Odontology Section - 2016

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### G38 Annapolis Mansion Fire — January 2015: Utilizing Dental Identifications

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After attending this presentation, attendees will recognize the benefits of dental identifications in horrific fire disasters. Attendees will also appreciate the steps utilized in making the dental identifications.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by sharing the details of the horrific fire in Annapolis, MD, and the identification of the six victims of that fire.

On January 19, 2015, a mansion in Annapolis, MD, was completely destroyed by fire and killed six family members. The Medical Examiners' Dental Identification Team (MEDIT), a component of the Maryland Responds Medical Reserve Corps to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) in Baltimore, provided subject matter expert assistance. The Maryland Responds forensic odontologists liaised with the OCME Chief Forensic Odontologist.

Antemortem family dental radiographs and written records of the victims were collected from treating dentists by law enforcement investigators and delivered to the OCME. The MEDIT members examined and collated the dental records into six single documents that illustrated the best dental representation for each victim prior to the tragedy. Over the next six days, victim remains were methodically recovered from the extinguished inferno to preserve evidence. The remains were delivered to the OCME per protocol. Postmortem dental examination and radiographic images produced six postmortem records. These new records were compared to the previously prepared antemortem records.

There are three legal methods of human identification, including antemortem/postmortem fingerprints, DNA, and dental comparisons. The goal of each method is to categorize and exclude all non-match victims, yielding a single remaining victim that matches an antemortem record. Fingerprints can be quickly degraded, and DNA often requires extensive analysis and prohibitive costs. The rapid acquisition of antemortem dental records enables a single positive identification to be rendered in a timely fashion for the grieving family.

"Closure" is a term frequently used by the public and media in these circumstances, but it is rarely heard within the forensic community and by families. The forensic community is more focused on achieving a 100% correct result and completing their work in a timely fashion. Families are wounded forever by these tragedies, but they can rest assured that the human remains released by the OCME are in fact their loved ones ready for burial.

Consequently, members of the Maryland MEDIT, like other Medical Reserve Corps specialty volunteers, experienced a sense of privilege in their swift contribution in completing the dental identifications in order to resolve this case. The families are now able to move forward with funerals and burials. Hopefully, sometime in the future, the families will experience healing and resolution with the gift of time.

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**Annapolis, Dental IDs, Fire**