



G15 Domestic Violence and the Death of a Child

Barry E. Lipton, DDS, 2549 Eagles Crossing Drive, Clearwater, FL 33762*

After attending this presentation, attendees will understand: (1) the need to properly document a case and preserve the evidence, taking into consideration the time frame that may occur between the actual crime and potential litigation of the case; (2) how to prepare a case for trial even though testimony may be years in the future; and, (3) dental anomalies and their occurrence in the general population.

Testifying in a court of law is not the normal environment for a forensic dentist. As such, this presentation will impact the forensic science community by educating attendees on how to be: (1) prepared to recall the details of an investigation that may have occurred several years previously; (2) able to educate the judge and jury as to the findings; and, (3) able to render a professional opinion.

On the morning of May 5, 2009, the Hillsborough County Medical Examiner's office requested a forensic dental consultation to examine and evaluate a soft tissue injury located on the left chest of a 2-year-old child who was found in the median of Route 275, a high-speed roadway that passes through Tampa, FL. Based on the initial investigation, this child was believed to have been alive prior to being thrown from a moving vehicle that was traveling above 65 miles per hour. Based on the examination of the decedent, this specific injury was found not to be a human bitemark.

Following established protocol, on May 6, 2009, the Hillsborough County Sheriff's office produced several photographs of three soft tissue-pattern injuries present on the arms and right shoulder of the child's mother, an emancipated teen. These injuries were determined to be human bitemarks, and arrangements were made for a forensic dental examination and analysis of these bitemark injuries. On May 7, 2009, a forensic dental examination was conducted on the child's mother, who was herself the victim of domestic violence. During this examination, two additional human bitemarks were found on the victim. These additional injuries were located on her left cheek and left neck. The entire examination was conducted and the evidence documented in accordance with the then-current American Board of Forensic Odontology (ABFO) Bitemark Guidelines.

On May 10, 2009, the suspect in this case, the boyfriend of the mother, was examined per a court-ordered search warrant. The forensic dental evidence, findings, opinion, and court testimony will be presented.

This presentation will review the techniques used in documenting these multiple-patterned injuries, obtaining the dental records from the suspect, the results of the dental comparison of the injuries on the day they happened, and the physical and visual changes observed in these injuries over several days' healing. In addition, potential problems associated with multiple-patterned injuries (bitemarks), such as whether there was more than one assailant, the involvement of a forensic odontologist immediately after the injuries occur, the need for proper written documentation, photographs, collection of evidence, and preparation for trial, will also be considered.

Multiple Bitemarks, Record Keeping, Observation