



### **A108 The American Board of Forensic Anthropology (ABFA) Response to the Puerto Rico Bureau of Forensic Sciences (BFS): Partnering With the National Association of Attorney's General and the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors**

*Dana Austin, PhD\**, Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office, Fort Worth, TX 76104-4919; *MariaTeresa A. Tersigni-Tarrant, PhD\**, Saint Louis University School of Medicine, Saint Louis, MO 63104

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**Learning Overview:** After attending this presentation, attendees will be aware of successful means to organize and implement a forensic anthropology response to assist a medical examiner's office in the analysis of multiple skeletal cases.

**Impact on the Forensic Science Community:** This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating the organization and performance in a forensic anthropology response to an interagency medicolegal project. Lessons learned from a team of ABFA Diplomate forensic anthropologists assisting death investigation in Puerto Rico will be discussed.

This presentation details the processes of pre-deployment, deployment, and post-deployment as two groups of forensic anthropologists assisted the Puerto Rico BFS with a forensic anthropology case backlog in January and April of 2019. This backlog was, in part, due to the severe illness and resignation of Dr. Edwin Crespo Torres in 2018.

In this situation, where the scope of practice and type of assessment were unknown, the board-certified forensic anthropologists spent considerable time during the pre-deployment period planning for various contingencies and scenarios. The team was provided with an estimated number of skeletal cases requiring analysis; however, the condition of the remains and the laboratory facilities were unknown. The team created a bench notes template that encompassed the wide scope of forensic anthropological analysis: chain of custody, skeletal inventory, biological profile, trauma, postmortem interval, and taphonomy. The template was flexible to allow individual practitioners the freedom to complete analyses using the methods they found appropriate. During this pre-deployment process, a single individual served as the primary point of contact with the team-at-large and as leader of the anthropology team to facilitate communication, completeness, and a cohesive group.

During the first deployment, triage at the Puerto Rico BFS determined priority of casework and division of labor for the team. The six senior anthropologists and two graduate students needed to understand and follow the same processes of documentation with common bench notes, photography, radiography, DNA sampling, and chain of custody for transfer of the cases to the Puerto Rico BFS staff. A single anthropologist focused on ensuring Quality Assurance (QA) and Quality Control (QC) during the implementation and completion of these processes was critical. The QA/QC leader allowed for the rest of the team to concentrate on completing 47 cases, including 17 forensically significant cases, 22 cemetery remains that were not of forensic significance, 7 non-human bone cases, 2 cases comprised of "Other," and review 14 skeletal case files to assess future needs.

Once the first deployment was completed, summaries and complete case files were provided to the Chief Medical Examiner. An inventory of available equipment, disposable supplies, and reference material was completed for anticipated future anthropology team deployment. Each anthropologist departed with their own bench notes and were provided case report templates and deadlines to complete signed case reports. Case report templates ensured that all reports were uniform in terms of the information that was provided to the Puerto Rico BFS. Once completed, the entire case file and report were reviewed by a single peer reviewer. Peer review provided another QA/QC check to ensure that the notes and case reports were complete, consistent with the template, and that the findings were sound and based on good science.

A second deployment in April 2019 included the same team leader and three new anthropologists. The Puerto Rico BFS staff was prepared for the second team, now comfortable with the processes put in place and enthusiastic because of the amount of work that had been completed on the previous deployment. The mortuary staff pulled numerous skeletal cases and staged them for the anthropologists before the team arrived. The staff also ensured workspace was available throughout the response. This allowed the second team to work more efficiently to complete even more casework, including 34 forensic cases, 17 cemetery remains, 7 non-human bone cases, and 2 cases involving other types of evidence.

This presentation provides knowledge gained during a multidisciplinary team response to a forensic laboratory facing numerous obstacles. The presentation focuses on the anthropology response, showcasing pre-deployment planning, process development, and the flexibility required to successfully perform forensic anthropological analysis in a remote, unknown medicolegal settings. The lessons learned from the response to BFS are applicable to other medical examiner offices facing similar obstacles.

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#### **Forensic Anthropology, Medicolegal Investigation, Multidisciplinary Collaboration**