

IMPORTANCE OF DENTAL RECORD IN IDENTIFYING DECEASED.

Dear Editor,

The patient's record maintains all the diagnostic information with regards to patients and contains valuable information that can be beneficial to the dentist as well as legal authorities during forensic human identification. Forensic odontology is primarily concerned with the use of teeth and oral structures for identification in a legal context. This helps in identifying the human remains in incidents such as terrorists' attacks, airplane, train and road accidents, fires, mass murders, and natural disasters such as tsunamis, earth quakes and floods, etc.

Dental structures are the hardest and well protected structures in the body. Dental features such as tooth morphology, variations in shape and size, restorations, pathologies, missing tooth, wear patterns, crowding of the teeth, colour and position of the tooth, rotations and other peculiar dental anomalies give every individual a unique identity. In absence of ante-mortem dental records for comparison, the teeth can help in the determination of age, sex, race/ethnicity, habits, occupations, etc. which can give further hints regarding the identity of the individuals. The use of unique features and morphological variations of the teeth in personal identification is well

accepted in forensic examinations and in the court of law. In spite of advances in the leading identification techniques such as DNA profiling, fingerprints and facial reconstruction, the comparison of dental records (records in the form of dentist's observations and radiographs) play a significant role in the identification of the deceased in mass fatality incidents. As forensic odontology is playing a major role in Disaster victims identification and other medico legal cases, there is utmost need to promote the speciality. The speciality is facing a backstep in India mainly due to the lack of dental record maintenance.

Initiatives like linking medical and dental records with Identification card such as the Aadhar card, a dentist can assess the dental status of the patient using his/her registration number and patients Aadhar card. The patient when screened by the dental institute or a certified dentist can update his/ her recent dental status in regards with the Aadhar card scan. This initiative can help in easy identification of cases in criminal investigations, mass disasters, grossly decomposed or traumatized. Dentists being aware of forensic odontology, still lack the information about the legal aspects of it. Forensic odontology should be included in the curriculum

as a separate subject to improve knowledge at the grassroots level. The focus should also be improved towards raising the awareness among private practitioners regarding the practical aspect of forensic odontology. The proper maintenance of record keeping is necessary for this era with considerable increase in dental tourism i.e., bringing a large sum of patients of foreign nationalities. A special course should be made mandatory in the undergraduate course in India, to introduce participants to a legal obligation of record-keeping and the importance

FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND SPONSORSHIP: NIL

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST: NIL

REFERENCES:

- 1) Al-Azri AR, Harford J, James H. Awareness of forensic odontology among dentists in Australia: are they keeping forensically valuable dental records? *Aust Dent J.* 2016 Mar;61(1):102-108.

and application of documentation in dental identification and use in forensic expertise with litigation related to negligence, malpractice, and the qualification of orofacial injury. We expect the Indian association of forensic Odontology (IAFO) to take further measures by advising authorities to include a basic course of forensic odontology in the undergraduate dental curriculum.

Address for correspondence

Dr N S Shree Abhirami

Department of Oral Medicine and Radiology

Saveetha Dental College and Hospitals

Received on: 12th April 2022 Accepted on: 15th May 2022

Published on: 27th June 2022

- 2) Berketa JW, James H, Lake AW. Forensic odontology involvement in disaster victim identification. *Forensic Sci Med Pathol.* 2012 Jun;8(2):148-56.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.