

IMPORTANCE OF DENTISTRY IN FORENSICS

Forensic odontology is a branch that connects dentistry and the legal profession. One of the members in the forensic investigation team is a dentist. Dentists play an important and significant role in various aspects of the identification of persons in various forensic circumstances. Forensic dental fieldwork requires an interdisciplinary knowledge of dental science. Most often the role of the forensic odontologist is to establish a person's identity. Teeth, with their physiologic variations, pathoses and effects of therapy, record information that remains throughout life and beyond. The teeth may also be used as weapons and, under certain circumstances, may leave information about the identity of the biter. Forensic odontology has an important role in the recognition of abuse among persons of all ages. Dental professionals have a major role to play in keeping accurate dental records and providing all necessary information so that legal authorities may recognize malpractice, negligence, fraud or abuse, and identify unknown humans. However, several dentists and legal professionals are quite ignorant of this fascinating aspect of forensic odontology. A need was felt to fill this gap. The dental record is a legal document possessed by the dentist and it contains subjective and objective information about the patient. A PubMed search and Google search were done for articles highlighting the importance of dental records in forensic sciences using the key words "forensic odontology, forensic dentistry, forensic dentists, identification, dental records, and dental chart".

The present article highlights the role of dentists in forensic sciences, their possible contributions to forensics, and the various aspects of forensic dentistry, thus bridging the gap of knowledge between the legal and the dental fraternities.

Teeth can be used to inflict serious injury on an attacker and maybe the only available defensive method for victim. Alternatively, it is well known that assailants in sexual attacks, including sexual homicide, rape, and child sexual abuse, often bite their victims as an expression of dominance, rage, and animalistic behavior. It should be worth mentioning that children who are unable to crawl cannot cause a self-inflicted injury, and therefore, severe bruising or fractures in a child <6 months to 9 months old are almost universally inflicted non accidentally by a second party.

Dental treatment itself is the biggest single contributor to the uniqueness of an individual's dentition and along with development characteristics, is the key to enabling identification of the dead from an examination of the oral cavity, forensic dentistry relies on this indestructibility, and its scientific advancement is designed to extract increasing amounts of identifiable information from oral structures, which more than any other part of the body, mirror the fortunes of the individual concerned. The identification of a deceased individual or of a mark left by his or her teeth is the purpose of the forensic dentist reduced to its simplest terms; forensic dentistry has only two aims, namely,

1. The relatively simple one of identification of the dead and

2. The more complex one of identifying an assailant who has used his or her teeth as weapons.

In India, qualified forensic odontologist is very few, so an attempt should be made to reinforce awareness among dental practitioner about the person identification and maintaining records of all patients.

CONCLUSION

This condition, however, could be improved if necessary, steps are taken to make forensic odontology a part of our course. In addition, periodic conferences and seminars if conducted would help the dental practitioners and students enrich their knowledge about forensic odontology.

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