



F46 The Whole Tooth and Nothing But the Tooth – A Case Report

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Traditionally, forensic odontologists have been called upon to match a decedent to postmortem dental remains. However, in this interesting civil malpractice case, the forensic dental team was asked to prove just the opposite. The goal of this presentation is to highlight how, with the use of computerized tools, the forensic dentist can rapidly and cost effectively prove the provenance of extracted teeth.

On a daily basis in medical examiner's offices throughout the United States, forensic dentists are typically called in to examine postmortem remains, chart them, and take radiographs. This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating how forensic dentistry, along with fingerprinting and DNA, are the significant modalities for identification in mass disaster situations as well. Each one of these disciplines can be used for identification. In many cases, all of these modalities may be incorporated into the identification process.

In this civil malpractice case, the forensic dentist was presented with three extracted third molar teeth and asked to verify that they were indeed the teeth extracted from the plaintiff. According to the plaintiff's attorney, he was given these three teeth by an auxiliary working in the oral surgeon's office post extraction. They were wrapped in gauze, paper

towels, and placed in a plastic bag for the patient to take home. Post surgical complications experienced by the patient prompted a malpractice lawsuit.

During depositions, prior to any contact with the forensic dentist, the oral surgeon presented his four-page medical treatment record of the extraction of three third molars. A detailed account of the "sectioning" of the two lower third molars was included in this record. The plaintiff then produced the three "whole" third molars in his possession. The oral surgeon challenged the origin of these teeth and claimed that these were not the teeth he extracted. Subsequently, the teeth were presented to the forensic dentist for examination, photography, and radiography. The attorney for the plaintiff also provided a panograph of his client taken just prior to the extractions. The plaintiff presented for upper and lower post surgical impressions of his dentition.

The use of computerized tools in conjunction with accepted forensic odontology techniques positively identified the three whole, unsectioned teeth as those belonging to the plaintiff. The plaintiff's attorney, armed with this information, consulted the forensic odontologist with regard to using DNA as an additional modality for positive identification. The trial commenced with the forensic odontologist appearing as the expert witness in the case.

Antemortem, Postmortem, Odontology