G25   The Lake Ontario Floater: Identifying "John Doe"

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be aware of the assistance that organizations such as the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) can provide in identifying a cadaver that could literally have come from anywhere. As odontologists, we can profile and chart, but that information doesn't help much if we have nothing to compare it to. NamUs is one repository for information that can be provided on unidentified persons, which will: (1) cross match information that is input about an unidentified person with information posted by other agencies about missing people; and, (2) look for matches or similarities between cases. It is amazing that a detail of a case which may seem insignificant can lead to an avenue that, when followed, leads to closure of a case that wouldn't have been closed otherwise.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by increasing awareness of a valuable search tool to help generate leads in cases of missing or unidentified remains.

The type of case that is being presented comes to every medical examiner's office at some time and presents the problem of a set of unidentified human remains. The body in this case, that of a decomposed white male wearing shorts and an overcoat, with no identification, drifted into Irondequoit Bay from Lake Ontario on June 23, 2015.

This person could have originated from nearly anywhere. The Great Lakes are a connected system of lakes and waterways that also are part of the border of the United States and Canada. A body found in Lake Ontario could have originated from any of the Great Lakes and from either the United States or Canada. Complicating issues is the fact that foreign ships also use all of the Great Lakes, entering and leaving the system via the Saint Lawrence Seaway.

In international cases, the jurisdiction falls to the country and county where the body is found. A dental workup was performed for this decedent at the Monroe County Office of the Medical Examiner in Rochester, NY. The dental structures were in excellent condition. In the first weeks, there were several missing persons reported from Canada and the United States. These missing persons were excluded as a "match" by comparisons of dental records.

The dental records and all other information from the Monroe County Office of the Medical Examiner were entered in NamUs. Two weeks later, there was a "hit" on the information provided to NamUs, which led to the positive identification of this "John Doe".

This case emphasizes the need for a database that can find similarities in two different sets of data (the missing person data and the data gleaned from the remains) and narrow the list of possible matches that exist. That need has been met in the NamUs system. NamUs represents an excellent tool that can help identify missing persons.

Search Engine, Missing, Unidentified