

Tongue position and its correlation with the method of death and sequential stages of body decomposition

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ORAL PRESENTATION
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ABSTRACT

Tongue protrusion is a common but non-specific finding in the forensic examination of bodies. Previously protrusion of the tongue in the forensic examination of bodies had only been documented in cases of hanging and advanced putrefaction. No baseline data exists for the prevalence of tongue position in the general practice of forensic medicine and dentistry. This research project was carried out to document the tongue position and condition of the bodies at the time of the forensic examination. This was an observational and analytical study of tongue position and method of death in bodies determined during routine forensic examinations and was carried out by the two authors at the medico-legal mortuary in Pretoria. Tongue position was recorded in all cases where position of the tongue could be visually determined. A protruded tongue was defined as one which extends beyond the dental arches with the teeth separated and a non-protruded tongue was defined as one positioned within the occluded dental arches. The condition of the body was recorded as: fresh, fresh with rigor mortis, bloat, active decomposition, advanced decomposition and dry remains. The results of this research have shown that the majority of bodies presented with their tongues not protruded. It also showed that certain methods of death showed a strong correlation with protruded tongues. This research project has for the first time recorded tongue position in dead bodies and has establish base line data on several aspects on tongue position and method of death while considering the influences of the sequential stages of body decomposition. The results of this research will impact heavily on the day to day practice of forensic medicine and dentistry and highlight the importance of documenting tongue position in all forensic reports