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## THE EVOLUTION OF DENTAL PARTICIPATION IN DISASTER VICTIM IDENTIFICATION IN THE UNITED STATES

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*The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.*

*Dental identification has been used and accepted in the US since the 1776 identification of the remains of Gen. Warren by a dentist. Since then dentistry has played an important role in identifying victims of natural disasters, accidents, terrorist activity, and war-related incidents. Forensic dentistry has proven itself a rapid, reliable, economical, and scalable resource, and now has undertaken a similar role in the investigation and identification of victims of serial killers, genocide, and the ever-growing number of missing persons and unidentified bodies. A fundamental difference between these types of operations is the proximity (or lack thereof) of the victims temporally and geographically which highlights a shortcoming of information management – independent of the time frame or methodology. While communication between the traditional antemortem, postmortem, and comparison sections in dental identification are generally time and location constrained; communication between these entities becomes problematic as distance increases in space and time. Adoption of computer-assisted dental identification programs has lessened some problems but has exacerbated others. The generally thought-to-be-beneficial ability to capture and compare more detailed postmortem data also introduces chances for improper coding yielding incorrect exclusionary reports, while also increasing CPU needs and processing time. Although many forensic dentists consider a case closed upon rendering an opinion of identification (or exclusion), the dental data can also be useful to other personnel in the investigation / incident; however, for that to occur understandable dental data must be able to be transferred. The American Dental Association in cooperation with the National Institute of Standards and Technology has developed a data dictionary and exchange format to standardize such transmissions. SWGDVI, which enjoys international participation, is working to develop best practices to ensure that forensic dentists can not only continue to make identifications, but be able to share needed dental data with other team members.*

**KEYWORDS:** Forensic Odontology, Mass Disasters, Computer-Assisted Identification.

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