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Odontological Identification in Copenhagen – Typical Workflow and Results from a Five Year Retrospective Study

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INTRODUCTION

Forensic odontology is a commonly used method in Denmark for securing the identification of unidentified dead bodies. This is due to the Danish system with a central registry of name, residence and health care information, as well as a legal obligation for Danish dentists to keep thorough dental records.

In the years 2007-2011 the most frequent group of identification examinations performed in Copenhagen has been the “confirmation ID” (n=169). The second most common group has been the exclusively AM (n=82) and the least frequent group has been the exclusively PM (n=14).

This poster presents the typical workflow of the “confirmation ID” examinations. The results from a five year (2007-2011) retrospective study are presented. The data shown represent the 169 cases where the police had a strong expectation about the identity of the deceased – the “confirmation ID” cases. The exclusively ante mortem (AM) and exclusively post mortem (PM) cases are not represented.

BACKGROUND

The odontological identification examinations in Copenhagen are made upon request from the police. The identification cases can be divided into three main groups: exclusively AM cases, exclusively PM cases and cases where AM and PM are performed in conjunction with each other – “confirmation ID” cases. The exclusively AM cases are performed when a person is missing and the police request an odontological profile for a potential later identification. The pure PM examinations are performed when an unidentified body is found and there is no expectation about the identity of the deceased. Here clinical and x-ray examinations are performed and an odontological profile is produced for a potential later identification. In the “confirmation ID” cases there is a strong expectation about the identity of the deceased. Reasons for expecting a certain identity might be related to the location where the body is found. I.e. if a person is found dead in an apartment or house it will often be expected that the unidentified dead body is the resident. The expectation might also stem from items of identification (e.g. driver’s license or passport) found on the unidentified body or close to the body. These examinations result in a conclusion about the degree of identity match.

CONCLUSION

In Copenhagen in cases where there is an expectation about the identity of an unidentified body:

- Odontological identification in the majority of the cases offers an identification conclusion within one week.
- The most common type of unidentified body was found at place of residence, either putrefied or charred.
- The conclusion in almost 90% of the cases was an established ID. There were no exclusions of identity.
- There was a different distribution of ID-conclusions in cases with AM and x-rays available compared to cases with no AM x-rays.
- Digitalized dental records and x-rays are increasingly common as AM material.