

# Forensic odontology: A paradigm shift in the Indian context



Forensic odontology is one of the specialties in dentistry that involve identification beyond recognition through oral and paraoral structures, namely teeth, jaw bone, saliva, presence of foreign bodies, and skull structures. Identification of an individual is also possible from dental records such as clinical charts, X-rays, and dental models. Over the past decade, the field of forensic odontology has witnessed a steady increase in regard to the interests and contributions in India and abroad. This has stirred up the young dental professionals to get their hands in the field of forensic odontology.

It is a fact that there are specializations available in the subject of forensic odontology all around the globe; nevertheless, in India, from the time the Dental Council of India had included this as a part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year curriculum in the Revised Bachelor of Dental Surgery Course Regulations (2007), forensic odontology has spotted a remarkable growth. It also gives a sense of satisfaction to see the dedicated efforts by various academic institutions such as JSS University - Mysore, D. Y. Patil University - Navi Mumbai, and SDM College of Dental Sciences and Hospital - Dharwad and professional bodies like the Indian Association of Forensic Odontology and Indian Dental Association that offer courses in the form of master's degree, fellowship, and PG Diploma, respectively.

To build on and to effectuate the dearth of specialist, Gujarat Forensic Sciences University (GFSU), also started a postgraduate course - M. Sc. in Forensic Odontology in the year 2014. GFSU is the World's first and the only university dedicated to forensic and allied sciences that was established by the Government of Gujarat and recognized by the University Grants Commission as a State University with an objective of fulfilling the acute shortage against increasing demand of forensic experts in the country and around the world. As it is imperative for a medical college to be associated with a hospital for practical training, likewise GFSU too runs in parallel association with the Directorate of Forensic Science-Gujarat State, a state-of-the-art, NABL accredited, ISO-IEC 17025:2005 certified laboratory that provides hands-on training pertaining to various areas of forensic science, forensic psychology and research and

development. Today, it is a matter of great pride for GFSU to confer 59 students with the postgraduate degree in forensic odontology and who are lately working in different fields of forensic odontology – academics, research, and development and also in case investigations are few to name.

Human identification being an integral part of forensics always had a humanitarian aspect that has grown sufficiently now to be identified separately. In this context, the World's First International Centre for Humanitarian Forensics (ICHF) was launched in GFSU in collaboration with the International Committee of the Red Cross. The ICHF is planned to act as one-stop center of excellence in Asia for global high quality and sustainable capacity building, research and innovative projects that will underpin operational responses for humanitarian forensic purposes in human identification and other relevant contexts.

It is no surprise that there was variance in the achievements; nevertheless, the appetite to make a tangible impact has led to the additional sheen in recent years, namely:

- Approval of the DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill 2018 chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modiji
- Inclusion of dental insurance in treatment modalities by the Insurance and Regulatory Authority of India
- The Indian Army to create a database of dental records of army personnel
- Increased awareness and knowledge about forensic odontology to specialists/officials in forensic science laboratories, medical and dental colleges.


In a nutshell, it is imperative to give "science" the position, it greatly deserves for the overall development in India. Support from forensic medicine department, law enforcement, and above all fellow dental colleagues is needed to enhance the science of forensic odontology. It can be achieved through imparting appropriate knowledge among various stakeholders such as the police, forensic medical examiners and the judiciary, and disaster management authorities. It gives a sense of satisfaction to see the dedicated efforts of many forensic odontologists in

India and also their contributions in this field in the form of scientific sessions and hands-on workshops in dental conferences to ensure the correct application of forensic odontology.

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