

Forensic odontology in India



The importance of the role of a forensic odontologist in personal identification in man-made or natural disasters, crime investigations, presenting evidence in court as expert witness, etc does not need to be much emphasized. In India, there are presently no recognized degree courses in forensic odontology. Few available forensic odontologists in India are trained and qualified from foreign countries, whose qualifications are recognized only recently by the government of India. For all practical purposes, the law enforcement authorities and judiciary seek the advice and help of the dental surgeons, posted at government hospitals or government medical/dental colleges regardless of their specialty having no specific training in the field of forensic odontology.

It is a good beginning that the Dental Council of India has included forensic odontology in their undergraduate curriculum, though it is not considered as a separate subject with a university examination at the end of each term. Considering the increase in the occurrence of accidents, crimes and natural calamities and also the advances made in biotechnology, DNA analysis, and application of computer programs in forensic studies, forensic odontology definitely qualifies to be a separate subject at undergraduate level itself. All it requires is a specified number of lecture hours and a five hundred square feet laboratory. As forensic odontology encompasses many dental specialties, each specialty can contribute lectures in different topics till qualified forensic odontologists are available in this country.

It is a fact that in India, the number of registered dental surgeons apparently surpasses the dentist population ratio recommended by WHO. There is a severe maldistribution of dental practice in India and most of the teaching institutions stopped employing BDS graduates. Unless new courses like MDS in forensic odontology at postgraduate level are introduced, it is inevitable that the future BDS graduates may deflect to jobs in call centers and other unrelated fields.

Even other universities under the faculty of science can start bachelor or master degree programs in forensic dental science, and those who finish such courses may assist the law enforcing authorities in the identification of victims in mass disasters, determination of the sex of unidentified individuals, age estimation etc.

Apart from the legal aspect, proper identification of the dead is essential for humanitarian causes, which include settlement of property, remarriage of the surviving spouse and facilitating and allowing the family members to conduct the last rituals of the dead.

I wish the forthcoming Annual National Conference of the Indian Association of Forensic Odontology a grand success.

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