

A model road map to the practice of forensic odontology



Forensic odontology/dentistry-a relatively young branch in India-successfully crossed the first milestone in the life of a specialty, upon its inclusion in the Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) curriculum in 2007 and recognition as a post graduate subject, in 2012.^[1] The next milestone to cross is to achieve greater inclusion in the forensic team. To achieve this, greater numbers of forensic dentists need to move from theory to practice. Those who choose to go the distance will find the following model road map helpful:

Step 1: Examine readiness to be a part of legal proceedings

The practice of forensic dentistry has an inherent need for being legally and procedurally correct. Therefore, forensic dentists have to be certain of strict adherence to protocols in sample collection, recording, and reporting; while maintaining a transparent and accountable chain of custody at all times. Additionally, team members should be capable of testifying in legal proceedings as and when required.

Step 2: Identify areas/applications of interest

Forensic dentistry has varying applications that require different levels of readiness both technically and emotionally on the part of team members. These factors need to be seriously considered before choosing the areas of interest. The applications include identification and age estimation of living or deceased individuals from their teeth, jaws, or facial bones; analysis of bite marks to identify perpetrators; victims of violent and sexual attacks; cases of family violence (marital, child and elderly abuse and neglect);

and last but not the least, to help in archeological and anthropological studies of populations.^[2]

Step 3: Ensure appropriate training and readiness of the team and laboratory

Having identified the application of forensic dentistry that the team would be focusing on the next step is to acquire the necessary technological and personnel capabilities.

Step 4: Contact the law enforcement/investigative agencies

To become a member of the forensic team it is essential that the appropriate arms of the law enforcement agencies such as the police, medical examiners, forensic laboratories, and the public prosecutor's office should be aware of the existence of the services. Therefore, the final step would be to contact members of each team and establish lines of communication.


Beginning with the first case and every case thereafter, always remember these words from Mark Twain: "If it is a Miracle, any sort of evidence will answer, but if it is a Fact, proof is necessary".^[3]

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Access this article online	
Website: www.jfds.org	Quick Response Code 
DOI: 10.4103/0975-1475.114534	

How to cite this article: Donoghue M. A model road map to the practice of forensic odontology. J Forensic Dent Sci 2013;5:1.