



Legal Reporting in Forensic Odontology

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Abstract

Writing an ideal Forensic odontology report is a blend of arts and science and sometimes it is challenging to write an ideal report. This article focuses on writing an ideal legal report.

Keywords: Forensic odontology; Reporting; Legal report writing

Introduction

Examination of teeth in many ways forms a unique part of human body as they are most durable and resilient part of the skeleton [1]. The science dealing with establishing identity of a person by teeth is popularly known as Forensic Odontology or Forensic Dentistry. Dental professionals have a major role to play in keeping accurate dental records and providing all necessary information so that legal authorities may recognize mal practice, negligence, fraud or abuse, and

identity of unknown individuals [2]. Apart from the documentation provided by the International Organization for Forensic Odontostomatology, [3] there is a paucity of literature available pertaining to the guidelines of an ideal and legal forensic odontology reporting. This limitation of the literature prompted the author to offer some more elaboration to the current guidelines, which can be easily adopted by forensic odontologists (Table 1- 4).

Report Writing

The Basic Requisites
The report should fulfil the national guidelines comply with national laws
The report should be written in a systemic way and it can be understandable by the lay person.
The report must explain the cause of death (trauma or violence) on the basis of orodental findings.
If possible the raw data or the worksheet should be provided (documenting the different stages of the investigations) by the forensic odontologist along with the report.

Table 1: Basic requisite.

The Requisition
The request for casework should be in writing; however verbal requests can be considered but should be followed by a written request.
The request should contain all the information pertaining to the case and the questions to be answered.

Table 2: Requisition.

The Report
Before post – mortem
Should be on official paper.
Should be given all the basic information (Forensic odontologist's name, Institution, address, email)
Obtain informed consent to the examination or alternatively view (and retain a copy of) a court order.
Date and place of examination
The date and detailing of the body, when it was found.

Possible cause of death according to police, family members and forensic pathologist
Name of forensic experts and police officers
The post-mortem
Detail description of the methodology to be used. If utilising a published method a reference should be cited.
Description of the material provided for the investigation.
Oral and Maxillofacial findings in detail.
Description of all teeth (filled, missing, carious, anomalous)
Description of prosthetic and orthodontic appliances (if present)
Radiographs and photographs (with and without ABFO No 2 scale)
Comparison of antemortem and post – mortem data
State a non harmonious finding in comparison to the findings of other forensic experts. (If applicable)
Write about the compatible features.

Table 3: Report.

Drawing a conclusion
A conclusion must be clear and descriptive and should not lead to misunderstanding.
State the comparative analysis of ante and post – mortem data.
State negative findings if relevant.
Give results from the calculations carried out for age and sex determination.
Discuss the interpretation of findings and results.
Try to address all the questions of requisition.
Discuss the limitations of the methods used.
State conclusions outside the request only if of great importance.
Finally, a report should be submitted to the relevant authority with the signature of the forensic odontologist accompanied by date, place, qualification and the statement that, the work and interpretation was done by best of his/her ability. The agreement of three forensic odontologists on the conclusion is required.

Table 4: Conclusion.

References

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