



Importance of Dental Records: A Forensic Perspective

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Abstract:

Dental records serve as an important source of information in medico-legal cases in general dental practice. It contains valuable diagnostic and treatment information which can aid in the identification of individuals which is otherwise difficult in the absence of personal information and fingerprints.

Keywords: Dental Records, Forensic, odontology, age estimation.

Introduction:

A dental record is an official dental document that contains records of the treatment done along with the communication related to the patient work occurring in the dental office. (1) They play a vital role in the identification of the deceased who has been grossly decayed.

Dental records serve as a crucial source of information not only for the dentist but also for the patients. The dentist must keep dental records for every patient being treated.

In our country due importance is not given to dental records but it's a legal obligation to maintain dental records in American and European countries. (2) We should be aware of the laws about medical records and official documents in our country. It is a moral responsibility and legal obligation of a doctor to conserve medical documents to maintain professional integrity under Section 51 A (h) of the Indian constitution. (3) Moreover, the dentist's written records are given due importance during a lawsuit as compared to the patient's recollections. (4)

How are dental records helpful in the identification of the deceased individual:

1. Important information that can aid in forensic identification should be recorded accurately while taking the medical and dental case history. It includes the name of the patient, and complete dental charting along with supporting radiographs, photographs and study models.(5)
2. The date of dental appointment should be given due importance as it can assist forensic experts and legal authorities in cases of a missing person or to check if a person was involved in a specific crime.

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Received : 25-02-2022

Accepted : 18-05-2022

Published: 30-06-2022

Access this article online	
Website: www.inpafo.org	Quick Response Code 
DOI: 10.53275/inapfo.2231-1092-2231-15721115	

How to cite this article: Mehta V. Importance of Dental Records: A Forensic Perspective. J Indo Pacific Acad Forensic Odontology 2022;11(1): 10-11

3. Dental radiographs play a vital role in diagnosis and treatment planning and also in the identification of individuals. They are considered to be a more reliable form of dental records. (6) They help in the identification process by revealing the patient's dentition along with tooth restorations and the presence of dental implants. They also have an important role to play in age estimation.
4. Study models and dental casts of the patients are also important in assisting the identification of an individual as they are unique for each individual.
5. Developmental disturbances in the size, shape, and number of teeth which are also unique for each dental patient can assist in the identification process.
6. Photographs play a vital role in the visual identification of an individual.
7. Dental records can also assist in identifying cases of child abuse. (7)

Future Perspectives:

Newer technologies should be incorporated into dental practice to accommodate a large number of records.

- **Electronic dental records:** Implementation of electronic dental records should be encouraged instead of conventional paper-based dental records. Further education and training in health informatics are recommended for healthcare professionals to facilitate efficient use and retrieval of data from the dental record software for medico-legal purposes.
- **Use of digital technologies:** The use of digital dental records which includes CT, CBCT, and 3D surface data will replace physical records soon. The most important advantages of digital data are stored for long periods and rapid transmission of data. (6)

Conclusion:

Maintenance of dental records by dental professionals is of paramount importance, especially when dealing with medico-legal cases. It is legally desirable and protects the dental professionals against medico-legal proceedings. They serve as an imperative document not only for the dental professional

for future referral purposes but also for the legal authorities for identification of decomposed bodies in mass disasters as teeth are the last remnants in the human body to be destroyed. They also assist in criminal investigations. We need to make the dental professionals in our country aware of the importance of maintenance of dental records and the laws about it through continued dental education, training, and quality assurance programs. In addition higher level of research is recommended to develop guidelines for dental record maintenance at the national level.

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