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FORENSIC DENTISTRY VS. PALEODONTOLOGY

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Forensic dentistry and paleodontontology are two disciplines sharing common observational platforms and methodology, but not a common purpose. The aim of this paper is to provide a short overview and comparison of these two disciplines in order to highlight their similarities and differences. Forensic dentistry or forensic odontology is the study of teeth and stomatognathic system in legal proceedings in the interest of justice. Forensic dentistry covers a wide variety of topics including individual or mass identification (including age and sex assessment) and bite mark analysis. Paleodontology is a discipline investigating teeth, features of stomatognathic system and oral health of ancient populations or early forms of life through skeletal or fossil remains. Paleodontology combines methods used in forensic dentistry and interprets the results in archaeological circumstances. Although forensic dentists and paleodonotologists very often use the same methods, the aim of their work is different. Identification of an unknown body is one of the most important parts of forensic dentist's work. Matching the unknown body and the name of the missing person is of the highest importance in forensic dentistry. This has less or no importance in paleodontology, because single bodies or skeletal remains of individuals are in the majority of cases used for reconstruction of life of the whole population. Making the dental pathology profile of earlier human populations (including data about dental caries, antemortem tooth loss, periapical abscess, enamel hypoplasia, dental calculus and alveolar resorption) yields valuable clues regarding diet, food preparation, nutrition and subsistence. The distribution of dental diseases by age, sex and status group can aid in the identifying the differential effects of nutritional stress within a population. Diagnosis and interpretation of dental illnesses in paleodemographic contexts are important steps in the attempt to reconstruct past lives. Forensic dentists and paleodontologists have been quick to recognize that a multidisciplinary approach is essential if they are to interpret correctly unidentified skeletal human remains of recent or archaeological origin found in excavations.

Keywords: Forensic Dentistry; Paleodontology; Bioarchaeology