

## Dental Identification of Unknown Bodies

K A Brown,\* BDS, FICD

### Summary

*Dental identification of unknown bodies is a well known and widely used method of identification and is especially valuable when other means of identification such as visual recognition and finger prints are not possible.*

*Traditionally, dental identification essentially depends on a comparison of the dental restorations present in the teeth of the deceased with the dental records of a missing person.*

*Difficulties are encountered in some cases when either or both of these elements are not sufficiently available to permit reliable identification. Serious damage to or complete destruction of restorations and disintegration of dental tissues as the result of extreme environmental changes, failure to recover all teeth and their included restorations, and incomplete dental records may frustrate the identification process.*

*An ominous challenge to dental identification however, is the result of the dramatic improvement in dental health in many countries due to the implementation of public health measures such as fluoridation with a consequent reduction in dental caries and restorations.*

*This paper offers some suggestions which may help to overcome some of these difficulties and explores some applications of new technology to the problems of dental identification in the future.*

*Keywords: Dental identification  
Problems  
Technology*

### Introduction

Of all aspects of forensic odontology, the most widely known and utilised is that which is concerned with the identification of unknown bodies. Indeed, to many both within the profession of dentistry and certainly among the lay public, forensic odontology is synonymous with identification of the dead by means of their teeth. Because so much has been published in text books, scientific journals and the popular press covering all facets of this fascinating field, it will be sufficient here merely to review the main principles relating to dental identification in general terms and then to focus upon a number of the problems that may be experienced in practice.

---

\* Senior Lecturer in Forensic Odontology, University of Adelaide, Australia.  
Address for Reprints: Dr K A Brown, Department of Oral Biology, The University of Adelaide, Adelaide, South Australia.