

Foreword

The subject of dental forensics has been recognized for decades as an area of emphasis for all interested and properly trained dentists in all hazards response. Additionally, the US Military and other entities within the federal government have recognized a role in the areas of emergency readiness and response for dentists for several years, but these subjects have not been on the forefront of awareness for most—until September 11, 2001.

Since then, professional dental organizations, schools of dentistry, individual authors, and other entities have emphasized dentistry's roles in emergency preparedness and response, bio-response, vaccination/immunization, disease surveillance, and other related activities. The Academy of General Dentistry (AGD) published an AGD Impact issue that highlighted roles played by AGD dentists in the September 11 aftermath [1]. In June 2002, the American Dental Association (ADA) convened a workshop titled, *Dentistry's Response to Bioterrorism*. Dr. Al Guay reported on the meeting in September 2002 [2].

In March 2003, the ADA and US Public Health Service (USPHS) collaborated to present *Dentistry's Role in Responding to Bioterrorism and Other Catastrophic Events*, a meeting that was attended by oral health and dental professionals from the Department of Defense, USPHS, numerous other federal agencies and operating divisions, representatives from organized dentistry, dental academia, and state, local, and other public health entities. At that meeting, United States Surgeon General, Vice Admiral Richard Carmona emphasized, "Dentists have a role in emergency response because they have the patient care skills, medical knowledge and communication skills."

At the same conference, Dr. Michael Alfano, Dean of the New York University College of Dentistry, spoke in support of an immunization and inoculation role for dentists. Illustrating his point with a picture of the needle tip on a dental syringe poised at the mandibular foramen on the bare mandible of a skull, he stated, "If you can hit this..." followed by a slide of a bare triceps injection site, "... you can hit this!"

For a time there seemed to be a groundswell of emergency preparedness awareness courses, casualty treatment and disaster response workshops, and articles presented by a variety of dental professional organizations and journals highlighting potential roles for dentists. An April 2006 article in the *Journal of the American Dental Association (JADA)* cited, from a variety of journals, 15 separate references that addressed the emergency response

role of dentists or dentistry. Those citations did not include references to dental forensics, which, for decades, has been a discipline within the oral health community and has been a well-accepted role for dentists.

During the summer of 2005, with the devastating hurricanes that struck the Gulf States, another facet in the role of dentists and dentistry in emergency response and event mitigation came to the collective consciousness of oral health professionals: could dentistry have roles that are deeper than forensics, patient counseling, and other public health roles?

In April 2006, JADA published an article written by several contributors that spelled out the process that occurred in Illinois, where an expanded role of “Dental Emergency Responder” has been written into the Illinois State Dental Practice Act [3]. Within the article was a description of a program developed by the American Medical Association through its Center for Public Health Preparedness and Disaster Response: the National Disaster Life Support (NDLS) program. Within the NDLS protocols there are clear roles that can be filled by properly trained dentists.

Having dentists named as potential participants in such a program enhances the credibility that properly trained dentists should have a proper role in disaster response. There are other disaster response protocols that do not currently recognize dentistry by name as potential participants (eg, the National Incident Management System and other command protocols). Issues such as the *Dental Clinics of North America* that highlight the voids in dental representation in disaster response programs may go far in disseminating the concept that the time has arrived for dentists and other properly trained oral health professionals to be full participants in recognized disaster response efforts.

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