

BOOK REVIEW

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A Review of *Person Identification by Means of the Teeth*

REFERENCE: Keiser-Nielsen, S., *Person Identification by Means of the Teeth*, John Wright & Sons Ltd., Bristol, Great Britain, 1980, 114 pages, no price listed.

With characteristic thoroughness, Dr. Keiser-Nielsen details the business of being a forensic odontologist. With brilliance he leads us down the mathematical road when considering the probabilities and possibilities involved in identification of human dentitions.

However, he speaks out for the Federation Dentaire Internationale (FDI) two-digit system of tooth classification, claiming it "is the simplest one available." This reviewer cannot agree because the universal system (1-32) is the only one that assigns a different number to every tooth *and* proceeds to do so in normal numerical sequence without skipping a number or reversing the order. At any rate, the universal system is the system used by the U.S. Armed Forces, U.S. dental insurance forms, and U.S. forensic odontologists. The author also insists that the assistant to the forensic odontologist be a dentist, "since specialized professional language is indispensable." Although I will often use the services of another forensic odontologist, I have ample confidence in the abilities of my dental assistants to accurately record everything that I dictate, whenever they assist at forensic examinations.

Strangely, Dr. Keiser-Nielsen regards radiographic examination as supplementary to clinical recording instead of the other way around. He points out, quite accurately, the possible inconsistencies in recording antemortem and postmortem information and then seems to overlook the objective benefits of a dental radiograph as the primary means of identification. For example, if a victim reveals an occlusal amalgam in each of the four first molars and the antemortem records reveal the same information, does this represent a positive identification? Obviously not. But if antemortem radiographs are available then comparison with postmortem films is all that is necessary even if clerical errors or omissions exist. He also fails to realize that most dentists record only dental treatment performed by them and not previous dentistry. One small omission is Dr. Keiser-Nielsen's failure to mention listing the *type* of root canal filling. Another shortcoming of this book is that he states, "Few dentists in the world have managed to obtain academic positions allowing them to be called routinely as dental experts by the appropriate agencies, thus to acquire broad practical experience and develop into forensic dental experts." This fact is certainly not true of the United States where a vast number of forensic odontologists are in general practice, not necessarily associated with a dental school and yet affiliated on a full-time basis with an official forensic science agency.

Not pointing out the objective importance of radiographs over clinical recording is the singular most important weakness in Dr. Keiser-Nielsen's otherwise helpful book. Again, the greatest value of this book is in its mathematical assessment of possibilities and its great attention to details in forensic odontology procedures.

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