ORİJİNAL ARAŞTIRMA ORIGINAL RESEARCH

DOI: 10.5336/dentalsci.2022-89768

Significance of Dental Archiving in Forensic Sciences: A Retrospective Study

Dental Arşivin Adli Bilimlerde Önemi: Retrospektif Bir Çalışma

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ABSTRACT Objective: To retrospectively evaluate the forensic dental records of patients referred to our faculty and offer a standard dental record form. Material and Methods: All forensic odontology cases referred to the our faculty between 2011 and 2019 were evaluated. In addition to demographic findings such as age and gender, the reasons for referral (file types) and dental examination findings were recorded. Differences between the forensic file types according to years were obtained. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and frequency distributions. Results: Of 127 dental forensic files evaluated, 54% of the files were trauma, 33% were malpractice and 13% were determination of age. When referral reasons are examined according to gender, it was shown that the number of males was much higher than females in trauma cases while number of females is high in others file types. Analyzing the files according to years showed that the cases before the year 2011 were disorganized and forensic files in 2012-2014 were missing. The malpractice cases were increased while trauma cases were decreased over the years. Conclusion: Trauma cases were the most common reason for referral to forensic cases. However, it was observed that the forensic reports evaluated did not include parameters for the evaluation of injury crimes in terms of forensic medicine. Inadequate forensic dental records also prove the importance of archiving dental files in forensic cases. With the proposal of dental report form presented, it will be possible to standardize and improve the quality of the forensic records.

Keywords: Forensic dentistry; dental records; dental archieve; trauma; malpractice

ÖZET Amaç: Bu çalışmanın amacı, fakültemize sevk edilen hastaların adli dental olgu kayıtlarını geriye dönük olarak değerlendirmek ve standardize dental kayıt formu oluşturmaktır. Gerec ve Yöntemler: Çalışmamız kapsamında, 2011-2019 yılları arasında fakültemize sevk edilen tüm adli olgular değerlendirildi. Yas, cinsiyet gibi demografik verilere ek olarak, başvuru sebebi (dosya türü) ve dental muayene bulguları kaydedilerek, adli dosya türlerinin yıllara göre değişimi değerlendirildi. Veriler tanımlayıcı istatistikler ve frekans dağılımları kullanılarak analiz edildi. Bulgular: Değerlendirilen 127 adli tıp dosvasının %54'ü travma, %33'ü malpraktis ve %13'ü vas tayinine yönelik olduğu saptandı. Başvuru sebepleri cinsiyete göre değerlendirildiğinde; travma olgularında erkeklerin sayısı kadınların sayısından fazla iken, diğer adli olgu türlerinde kadınların sayısı fazlaydı. Adli dosyalar yıllara göre analiz edildiğinde; 2011 yılı öncesi adli dental kayıtların düzensiz olduğu, 2012-2014 yılları arasındaki dosyalara ise ulaşılamadığı saptandı. Ayrıca malpraktis olgularının yıllar içinde arttığı saptanırken, travma olgularının ise azalma gösterdiği görüldü. Sonuç: Çalışmamızın bulguları, en sık adli vaka başvuru nedeninin travma olguları olduğunu gösterdi. Ancak değerlendirilen adli raporların, yaralama suçlarının adli tıp açısından değerlendirilmesine yönelik parametreleri içermediği saptandı. İncelenen adli dental kayıtların düzensiz ve eksik olması, adli vakalarda dental dosyaların arşivlenmesinin önemini kanıtlamaktadır. Sunulan dental kayıt formu önerisi ile dental adli kayıtların standardize edilmesinin ve bu kayıtların kalitesinin artırılmasının mümkün olacağı düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Adli diş hekimliği; dental kayıt; dental arşiv; travma; malpraktis

Forensic dentistry is a forensic science branch that involves archiving and evaluation of dental data for the benefit of justice. This branch serves in fields such as identification in natural disasters and other mass accidents, age and gender estimation with data obtained from teeth, bite mark assessment, medicolegal cases (MLC), dental and maxillofacial trauma. It also establishes scientific communication between



legal professionals and dentists who are the members of forensic investigation team.¹

A dental record includes detailed information about the anamnesis, physical examination, diagnosis, treatment, and management of a patient.² Taking accurate information is an essential skill for physicians. Every dentist has a legal duty to keep record of each patient provided with dental care.³ Dental records can also be used for forensic purposes and play an important role especially in identification of a person whose body integrity damaged. The teeth are one of the most resistant structures of the human body and are frequently found to be well preserved after death. This uniqueness of the teeth gives an advantage for identification of the victim in both criminal or MLC.⁴⁻⁶ In addition to the characteristics of teeth such as being resistant to physical and external factors for a long time, many dental factors such as localization, shape, form anomalies, restorations and lack of teeth play important roles in identification of the person in both criminal or MLC.^{1,4-7}

The number of dental professionals educated in forensic dentistry is limited in our country, thus each general dental practitioner can act as an expert in forensic cases when requested by judicial authorities.² Even though maintenance of dental record is legally mandatory in our country, awareness and knowledge of the dentists regarding the maintenance of dental records accurately for medico-legal purposes is insufficient. It is well known that the quality of records is extremely important in forensic sciences. However, the number of the retrospective and descriptive studies related to dental records in forensic dentistry cases in our country is limited.⁸

The aim of this study was to retrospectively evaluate forensic dental records archieved in Ege University, Faculty of Dentistry and to develop a standard dental record form acceptable for medicolegal purposes in forensic dentistry.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study protocol received ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee of of the Medical Faculty of Ege University (date: September 09, 2016, no: 16-5.2/6). The research was carried out in accordance with the conditions of the Declaration of Helsinki.

Documents archived as forensic cases were evaluated retrospectively by examining the dental charts, anamnesis and radiographs. Patients demographic findings such as age, gender were recorded. Also the reason for referral (file types) and findings of dental examination were also obtained. Quantitative data were analyzed using the mean±standard deviation, and qualitative variables were presented as frequency distributions and percentages.

RESULTS

As a result of retrospective evaluation, it was determined that forensic dental records in our faculty archive were regularly organized only for the last 8 years (2011-2019). Because the cases before the year 2011 were disorganized and forensic files in 2012-2014 were missing, they were not included to the present study. Analysis of the forensic dental records showed that total number of forensic odontology cases referred to our faculty between 2011 and 2019 was 127. Of 127 dental forensic cases evaluated, it was determined that 40% of the patients were female, while 60% were male. The mean age of the patients was 36.24 ± 0.68 years.

Distribution of file types in the present study is shown in Table 1. The most common reason for referral (case type) was trauma (54%), while 33% of cases were malpractice and 13% were determination of age (Table 1). When the cause of referral was analysed according to the gender, it was shown that the number of males was much higher than female in trauma cases, whereas the number of females was much higher than males in other cases (Table 1). The distribution of referral reasons according to the years was presented in Table 2. It was detected that the malpractice cases increased, while trauma cases decreased over the years.

TABLE 1: Distribution of file types according to gender.							
Case type (n, %)	Male	Female	Total				
Trauma	50 73%	19 27%	69 54%				
Malpractice	16 37%	26 63%	42 33%				
Age determination	3 21%	13 79%	16 13%				

TABLE 2: The distribution of cases according to the years.							
Years Reasons for application (n, %)							
	Trauma Malpractice Age determinatio						
2011	3.2	34%	1.0	78%	1.0	78%	
2012-2014	N/	N/A		A	N/A		
2015	11.8 58%		3.2	34%	0		
2016	11.8	58%	4.3	12%	(0	
2017	20.15	6%	8.6	24%	7.5	46%	
2018	14.10	92%	10.7	8%	4.3	12%	
2019	10.7	8%	16.12	48%	4.3	12%	

Not avaible: N/A

Among all the trauma cases evaluated, the most prevalent type of trauma was reported as an assault (n: 50, 74%). Furthermore, there were 15 (21%) traffic accident cases, 2 (2.5%) cases with firearm injury and 2 (2.5%) cases with cutter tool injury as trauma case.

According to the results, malpractice cases were the secondly encountered forensic case type and an increase in the number of malpractice cases according to years was determined (Table 2). In malpractice group, improper implant treatment (29%) and improper prosthetic treatment (24%) were the most commonly encountered cases (Table 3). Improper surgical intervention cases, endodontic treatment cases and improper ortodontic treatment cases were the other reasons of forensic cases that were frequently encountered (Table 3). The frequency distribution of malpractice cases revealed an interesting finding; before the year 2016; only 23% of malpractice cases were improper implant treatments; while all of malpractice cases (100%) after 2016 were improper implant treatment.

TABLE 3: Classification of the malpractice cases.					
Case type	Total	(n, %)			
Improper implant treatment	13	29			
Improper prosthehic treatment	10	24			
Improper surgical intervention	9	22			
Improper endodontic treatment	3	8			
Improper orthodontic treatment	2	5			
Other cases	5	12			

DISCUSSION

With the technological advancements, digital systems have taken the place of traditional forensic investigation methods in the field of forensic dentistry. Some advanced techniques such as digital forensic radiography and photography, intraoral 3-dimensional optical scanners, computerized facial reconstruction and 3-dimensional printing and artificial intelligence algoritms have improved forensic odontology dramatically in recent years.9 It is important that most of the studies using advanced technological techniques involve the development of methods for the detection and classification of existing/absent teeth in order to get dental records accurately.^{10,11} Although improvements in forensic odontology are promising, digital/non-digital forensic dentistry requires accurate and reliable archiving and storage of dental records. At this point, the results of our study showed that only 8-year of forensic dental cases of our faculty were regularly organized, while the forensic dental records for 2012-2014 could not be obtained. These findings proved the importance of regular storage and archiving as well as the standard preparation of forensic files.

The results of the present study revealed that 40% of the patients were female, while 60% were male. The possible reason for this finding, which was found to be compatible with similar previous studies, is thought to be due to the high rate of crime and the high motivation of men to use their judicial rights as compared with women.¹²⁻²³

When referral reasons for forensic odontology cases were evaluated according to gender, it was shown that the number of males was much higher than females in trauma cases.

This finding is in accordance with many studies report the prevalence of cranio-maxillofacial trauma is high among male populations compare with female groups.²⁴⁻²⁶ This could be attributed to the fact that male's heavy/dangerous working conditions, their crime profile, driving behaviour in traffic and deficit of male about observance of traffic rules.

Considering the malpractice and age determination cases, which are the most frequently observed forensic cases, after trauma cases, the number of females were higher than males (p<0.05). Forensic cases for age determination often include women in childhood with illegal marriages, this may be the possible reason of large portion of age determination cases are female. When malpractice cases were evaluated according to the gender, our study revealed that 63% of all the cases were female and this finding is compatible with previous studies on the professional liability and medical/dental malpractice.^{27,28} Because females attach importance to the oral&dental care and expect high quality aesthetic appearance from dental treatments, it has been considered that medical malpractice claims have surge especially among female patients.^{27,28}

Our findings regarding distribution of forensic cases according to years revealed that malpractice cases increase over the years. Likewise in current literature there are studies which demonstrate increase of malpractice claims.^{28,29} In our opinion, the main causes of growing malpractice claims include that individuals become aware about patients' rights in recent years and lawyers are often guiding in this topic. Apart from malpractice cases which the treatment is really failed, some patients with financial problems and personal debts have had numerous false dental/treatment complaints against the dentist.²⁷ This may be another reason for the increase in malpractice files.

In accordance with literature, the most frequent dental specialties involved in lawsuits were prosthodontics and implantology in our study.²⁹ In recent years, missing teeth have been generally resolved with implant-supported prosthesis instead of unstable removable prosthesis owing to advanced technological developments in dentistry. Because implant treatment is preferred by many dentist who is or is not a specialist in implantology, this current treatment approach may increase the number of malpractice cases, when implant treatment is failed.

According to the results of the present study, trauma is the most common reason for forensic cases. However, it was observed that evaluated files and reports did not contain any injury crime parameters for the evaluation of forensic medicine. The maxillofacial region, which is frequently exposed to trauma in cases of battery-violence and accident, comprises many organs that are extremely important to daily functions such as chewing, talking, breathing. In Türkiye, the degree of attenuation or loss of these organ functions related to trauma impact directly the type of punishment that be given by judicial authority. In our study, the majority of traumatic MLC occurred due to assault (n=50, 74%), followed by the traffic accident (n=15, 21%). In contrast to our study, a wide range of studies have reported a significant proportion of MLC to be road traffic accidents.³⁰⁻³³ The findings of study performed by Madadin et al in Saudi Arabia (fights or physical assault and battery, 83%- road traffic accident, 9.3%) are similar with our results.³⁴ In this study, low traffic accident rates are associated with accident report, because all traffic accidents are not reported as MLC in Saudi Arabia. Because our faculty is the biggest institution in region, many forensic cases from neighbouring provinces admit to the our faculty. The high nature of the assault rate in our study can be explained by the prevalent regional factors and sociocultural structure of these provinces.

Considering the results of the study; it was seen that standardization of previous forensic records in our faculty is insufficient and this records did not include evaluation parameters declared for the maxillofacial trauma cases in the Guideline for Assessment of Injury Crimes Defined in the Turkish Penal Code (TPC). In order to correctly canalize the judiciary, a standard forensic dental form including these main parameters in the Guideline for Assessment of Injury Crimes was created especially for trauma cases with the contribution of Department of Forensic Medicine of Ege University Faculty of Medicine.³⁵ The proposal forensic dental form created according to these paramaters is presented at the end of the manuscript (Table 4).

The first part of the proposal dental form consisted of the demographic information of the patient and the reasons for referral. The medical history of the patient as well as the history of the forensic case and the patient's complaints was included in the 2nd part, whereas the 3rd part composed of extraoral, intraoral, radiological examination findings and consultations. While the first 3 parts were based on

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information received from the routine forensic patient, the 4th part of the proposal form included the expressions and judgments that were frequently requested to be clarified by judicial units, especially in cases of trauma origin.

Four main judgments were declared for the maxillofacial trauma cases in the Guidelines for Assessment of Injury Crimes Defined in the TPC in terms of Forensic Medicine:³⁵ Influence of the bone fracture on life function (mild/middle/severe)

1. Condition of dental tissues (attenuation or loss)

2. Treatment of injury with "Basic Medical Intervention (BMI)"/or not.

3. The assessment of anterior tooth loss as Permanent Scar on the Face

INFLUENCE OF THE BONE FRACTURE ON THE LIFE FUNCTION

Especially in trauma cases, the main judgment to be determined in a forensic report was the effect of any bone fracture on life functions. Based on the declaration prepared by the Forensic Medicine Institute of Türkiye, influence rate of the maxillofacial bone fracture on the life function was scored as 1 (mild), 2-3 (middle), 4-6 (severe). For example; Le Fort 1 fracture (score 2) is mild fracture however, compound (open) or communited mandibular fractures (score 4) are severe fracture (Table 5). Table 5 shows the influence rate scores of the different bone fractures on the life function especially for maxillofacial region.

1. Condition of Dental Tissues (Attenuation or Loss)

The 2nd parameter to be determined is whether it is an *attenuation* of traumatized teeth or *loss* of teeth. These judgments are particularly important as they will affect the penalty to be imposed on the accused. Based on the declaration parameters, each teeth group was scored according to type and different functions such as aesthetic appearance, chewing and speech. When the sum of points is higher than 30 points it was considered as tooth *loss*, while it was considered as *attenuation* of traumatized tissue if it is between 15-30. The scores for different tooth types were presented below.

Incisors	4
Canine	4.5
Premolar	3
1^{st} and 2^{nd} molar	3
3rd molar	0.5

2. Treatment of Injury with "BMI"/or Not

The third parameter is whether the condition that occurred after the trauma could be solved with a BMI. Accordingly, loss of tooth (including primary teeth) or implant, subluxation of teeth, complicated teeth fracture and deep and wide laceration of tongue cannot be treated with BMI and such injuries were evaluated as complicated. However, simple injuries on the tongue and mucosal injuries were evaluated as mild injury and classified as not treated with BMI (Table 6).

TABLE 5: The influence rate scores of the different bone fractures on the life function. ³⁵
Maxilla fracture (close) (2)
Maxilla fracture (open) (3)
Le fort I (2)
Le fort II (3)
Le fort III (4)
Mandibular fracture (3)
Mandibular segmental fracture (4)
Temporo-mandibular joint dislocation (1)

TABLE 6: BMI scores of nose-mouth-tongue-mucosal lesions. ³⁶				
Nose-mouth-tongue-mucosal lesions				
Simple tongue injury	Treated with BMI			
Deep and wide laceration of tongue	Not treated with BMI			
Mucosal injury	Treated with BMI			
Loss of tooth	Not treated with BMI			
Luxation of teeth, complicated crown fracture	Not treated with BMI			

BMI: Basic medical intervention.

3. The Assessment of Anterior Tooth Loss as Permanent Scar on the Face

According to Guideline on the Evaluation of Injury Crimes defined in TPC in terms of Forensic Medicine, it has been evaluated as "Permanent Scar on the Face" if maxillary and mandibular anterior tooth loss cannot be treated with implant or prosthetic treatment (crown or bridge). As a matter of fact, tooth loss decided in this judgement is considered within the scope of serious injury, especially as a result of intentional injuries in the TPC. However, at this point, parameters such as pre-existing tooth fractures and losses, former/natural condition of oral tissue of the patient before trauma should also be taken into account in the forensic assessment. This also shows the importance of maintaining accurate dental records containing all the relevant details.

The main limitation of the present study is the lack of standardization in forensic dental records of our faculty. Accordingly, because of our studys' retrospective nature, maxillofacial trauma cases could not be evaluated with above-mentioned parameters. Morover, since our study was conducted in a single center, outcomes of the study revealed only a limited population. Therefore it is suggested that further prospective studies of forensic cases, conducted on larger study populations using standardized dental forms will contribute more to current literature.

CONCLUSION

Every dental professional has the legal obligation for both to prepare forensic dental form and to keep dental record for medico-legal cases. Considering that the majority of the forensic archive of our faculty with a history of 50 years was disorganized, the importance of record keeping and archiving becomes clear for judicial cases. In line with our findings using a standard forensic dental report form for dental practices especially in trauma cases, will be beneficial for archiving and standardization.

Source of Finance

During this study, no financial or spiritual support was received

neither from any pharmaceutical company that has a direct connection with the research subject, nor from a company that provides or produces medical instruments and materials which may negatively affect the evaluation process of this study.

Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest between the authors and / or family members of the scientific and medical committee members or members of the potential conflicts of interest, counseling, expertise, working conditions, share holding and similar situations in any firm.

Authorship Contributions

Idea/Concept: Elif Şener, Ceyda Gürhan; Design: Elif Şener, Ceyda Gürhan, Esin Alpöz, Nesrin Dündar; Control/Supervision: Elif Şener, Ceyda Gürhan; Data Collection and/or Processing: Elif Şener, Ceyda Gürhan; Analysis and/or Interpretation: Elif Şener, Ender Şenol, Ceyda Gürhan; Literature Review: Ceyda Gürhan; Writing the Article: Elif Şener, Ceyda Gürhan, Esin Alpöz, Nesrin Dündar; Critical Review: Esin Alpöz, Nesrin Dündar; Materials: Ceyda Gürhan.

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