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Interview / Entrevista

Prof. PhD. VILMA PINCHI



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CURRICULUM VITAE (SUMMARY)

- Associate Professor of Legal Medicine, Department of Medical Forensic Sciences, University of Firenze;
- Dental studies at University of Perugia cum laude in 1993. PhD in Medical Forensic Sciences cum laude in 1999 at University of Brescia. Master in Bioethics in Clinical Daily Activity at University of Firenze in 2009.
- Since 1993 has worked as private practitioner and is regularly appointed as Expert Witness in criminal and civil Courts both in cases involving body identification, age assessment and dental professional liability.
- Secretary of Pro.O.F. (Forensic Odontology Project) and the course organizer of the annual post-graduate Master in Forensic Odontology at University of Firenze .
- Co-author of Forensic Odontology and Legal Medicine textbooks.
- President – IOFOS (International Organization of Forensic Odontostomatology) 2014-17;
- Author of several scientific papers and lectures nationally and internationally
- More academic information:
<http://www.unifi.it/index.php?module=ofform2&mode=2&cmd=1&AA=2013&dip=200009&rd=&doc=3f2b342a362f2b>.

(1) How did you become interested in Forensic Dentistry?

My interest for Forensic Dentistry has started when I attended to lessons of Legal Medicine during my graduation. Then I decided to do my final thesis in Forensic Dentistry. A PhD followed and my University career has begun.

(2) How is the job market in Italy and what are the possibilities to work in Forensic Dentistry?

In Italy as in many other countries, “Forensic Dentistry” encompasses also Legal Medicine in Dentistry, so that Forensic odontologists serve as experts for several cases ranging from body identification, age estimation, bitemarks, but

also dental litigation, criminal cases, etc. In Italy we have very few Forensic Odontologists that have stable connections with Legal Medicine Institutes and none are employed by Police, so that dental data tend to be underused for body identification respect to other primary identifiers (fingerprints and DNA).

(3) Are there graduation courses (specialization, masters or PhD training) in Forensic Dentistry?

No course of specialization or specific PhD course in Forensic Odontology exist in Italy. On the contrary, at University of Florence, our Institute of Forensic Medical Sciences has organized every year, since 1999, an annual Master Course in Forensic Odontology. Twenty students have attained the master in Forensic Odontology every year and a scientific Society (Forensic Odontology Project – Pro.O.F.) gathered about 300 former students and, actually, it is the largest and the most active Italian association of forensic odontologists.

(4) How is Forensic Dentistry taught in the undergraduation and graduation courses in Italy?

Generally speaking, we have about 30 graduation courses in Dentistry in Italy and at least in two third of courses the lessons of Legal Medicine are provided by medical doctors specialized in Legal Medicine. Only in very few faculties Forensic Odontologists are involved in teaching.

(5) Are there official Forensic Odontologists in the Italian police? How the Italian dentists start working in the forensic field? When forensic expertises in dental evidences, such as dental human identifications, are requested in Italy? What is the current panorama of forensic dentists working in Italy (number, level of education, etc)?

As I said above, no Forensic Odontologists are employed by Police and very few have connections with University. Institutes of Forensic Medicine that generally provide experts for courts or judges in many forensic circumstances.

(6) Could you refer to any important case in the history of Italy in which Forensic Odontologists played an essential part?

We had several cases in which bodies were identified by teeth and some cases of bitemarks. Moreover, Forensic Odontologists are often requested to give opinions in criminal cases for age assessment or in case of personal lesions occurred in the stomatognathic area during violent crimes, assault, child battery, etc.

(7) In order to update our readers, what is the role of IOFOS? What are the activities involved within the organization?

The International Organization for Forensic Odonto-stomatology is a liaison between societies of (Legal) Forensic Odontology on a global basis. IOFOS aims to promote goodwill, advancement and research in Forensic Odontology also through a triennial International conference,

the Journal of Forensic Odontostomatology (JFOS) and IOFOS newsletter.

(8) What were the main challenges that you faced as the President of IOFOS? As the president of IOFOS, how do you see the current scenario of Forensic Dentistry worldwide in relation to the number of experts, their activities and importance?

Really I have enjoyed both terms of my Presidency, but I cannot hide that something has challenged me and IOFOS Board. First we tried to enlarge the IOFOS family by including more national societies and lead IOFOS to be more global and less European. At the moment IOFOS with its 34 member societies has achieved a good result but many other nations should be contacted and possibly included. Forensic Odontology community is a little one if compared to other forensic areas and in some countries, very few Forensic Odontologists are available for several millions of citizens. In some countries no societies or associations of forensic odontologists have yet been founded so that IOFOS have the unique chance to keep contacts with Forensic Odontologists. All around the world, with very few exceptions, dental data are often disregarded or underused in body identification and Forensic Odontology finds difficulties in becoming a full-time job. Forensic Odontologists continue to practice as dental practitioner, insurance advisors or in other fields since forensic cases are too few. Forensic Odontologists in each country continue to stand offering their education, qualification and expertise to authorities

and entities entitled to manage forensic cases, but sometimes it is a real battle despite dental data have largely proved to be a reliable forensic tool for identifying bodies or by providing relevant piece of information about the so called "*biological identikit*" of the missing person (evidence of disease, occupational, drug, habits, etc), for age estimation and bitemark analysis. Moreover, Forensic Odontologists are trained in medico-legal area, familiar in documenting and discussing evidence, used to convey them to adjudicators or Courts and well acquainted with reporting and testifying in Court.

(9) What is the role of IOFOS in the DVI cases that occurred in Europe, and in the current trend of illegal migration of unidentified adults and children?

IOFOS is a scientific entity and has no jurisdiction in different countries. In some cases, IOFOS served for providing contacts between Forensic Odontologists deployed in DVI postmortem team in one country and Forensic Odontologist of the country of origin of one of the victims, thus facilitating the collection of Ante Mortem data.

(10) What recommendations would you suggest to the Brazilian Association of Forensic Odontology (ABOL) in order to strength the field of Forensic Dentistry?

My usual recommendations are: 1- strengthen education and training of Forensic Odontologists through dedicated workshops and updating courses and by creating specific postgraduate curricula in Forensic Odontology; 2- stress the

relevance of forensic odontology through systematic scientific publications; 3- try to empower forensic odontology by establishing good and strong connections with the national and local Government, institutions and entities which have the responsibility of the forensic case management.

(11) What is the importance of the Journal of Forensic Odontostomatology for IOFOS and how the need for a scientific journal in Forensic and Dentistry arose?

JFOS was founded practically together IOFOS and, after more than 30 years from its foundation, JFOS remains one the most relevant journal dedicated to Forensic Odontology.

(12) What are your expectations for the job market and professional valuation of

Forensic Odontologists considering your position as a Professor, President of IOFOS, and a respected person in the field of Forensic Dentistry?

As I said the capability of Forensic Odontology to be a full-time job seems limited to very few exceptions all around the world. Some colleagues as me serve as professors at Universities or are employed by Police or Army. These connections facilitate Forensic Odontologists in being enrolled by Courts, Police or Institutions receiving several charges during the year. Nevertheless in some Countries (US for instance) most reputable and highly committed forensic odontologists are private practitioners.

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