New technology set to 'revolutionize' the identification of disaster victims

June 13 2012

Forensics across the world will be better equipped to identify the age of people who die in natural disasters.

Scientists at Queen Mary, University of London have developed an online interactive tool which will enable experts to assess people's teeth and accurately estimate their age.

The London Tooth Atlas is a culmination of years of research from Dr Helen Liversidge and her team at Queen Mary dedicated to dental development.

Dr Liversidge said: "This interactive tool builds on the creation of our London Tooth Atlas hard copy version which was used in a number of disasters such as the New Zealand earthquake (2011).

"We expect the new software will revolutionise the way forensics determine the age of victims."

The London Tooth Atlas was underpinned by the need to estimate the ages of victims of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami using dental data.

It enables experts and students to see how teeth change between the ages of 30 weeks in utero to about 23 years.

Dr Sakher AlQahtani who works with Dr Liversidge at Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry (part of Queen Mary),

developed the London Tooth Atlas for his post-graduate research project.

"The interactive version enables people to better understand and see the differences in tooth development up to the age of 23," he said.

"It will be extremely useful for educating dental students, and assisting forensic odontology, disaster victim identification teams and archaeology, as well as in estimating the age of asylum seeking minors."

The software is available at www.atlas.dentistry.qmul.ac.uk and an app to support this will soon be available for downloading.

Professor of Anatomy and Forensic Anthropology at the University of Dundee, Sue Black, said: "When working in a forensic environment, immediate access to information can be vital. The Tooth Atlas app will prove to be invaluable as a ready source of instant detail for the forensic odontologist, forensic anthropologist and forensic pathologist."

Professor Jules Kieser, Head of the Department of Oral Sciences at the University of Otago, said: "The Atlas has been a superb help to myself and my forensic odontology colleagues. Not only do we now use it routinely, but we used it to identify victims of the Christchurch earthquake. Importantly, if it were available as an app, it will clearly be more accessible. This is an exciting prospect that I support fully and enthusiastically!"

More information: To use the software, click on the following link: www.atlas.dentistry.qmul.ac.uk … dex.php?NOLOGIN=TRUE

Provided by Queen Mary, University of London