

UBC Forensic Dentist Appointed to Order of Canada

July 2, 2008

Vancouver, BC – UBC Faculty of Dentistry alumnus and Professor David J. Sweet, D.M.D., Ph.D., D.A.B.F.O (Forensic Odontologist), has been appointed to Officer of the Order of Canada.

Established in 1967, the Order of Canada is the highest honour awarded to Canadian citizens for a lifetime of outstanding achievement, dedication to the community and service to the nation honouring people in all sectors of Canadian society.

Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada, announced Dr. Sweet's appointment on July 1, 2008 for enhancing Canada's reputation as a leader in forensic odontology—the science of victim identification using dental charts and analysis of teeth—and for his contributions as a teacher, researcher and consultant.

Dr. Sweet, one of the world's foremost experts in the area of Forensic Odontology, has numerous forensic science research achievements. He single-handedly conceptualized, developed, and tested a new, revolutionary way of deriving forensically-important genomic DNA from skeletal remains. This has allowed forensic investigators to re-visit old and "cold" cases to acquire DNA that was otherwise not recoverable.

Dr. Sweet developed the "double-swab" technique of DNA recovery. This method acquires genomic DNA from salivary stains left on human bite marks. Now a current standard, this technique advances bite mark matches beyond subjective comparisons based on a large number of clinical judgments.

Another standard technique recognized worldwide, Dr Sweet developed a "hollow-volume" computer-assisted tracing technique that allows objective comparisons to be made for visual bite mark comparisons.

Dr. Sweet is the founder and Director of the Bureau of Legal Dentistry (BOLD) at UBC a world-leading organization. Through his leadership, BOLD is well known within the Canadian Justice System and recognized around the world for forensic odontology research, training, casework, and pioneering techniques in forensic practice.

Many cases have been solved because of the ground breaking new practices that Dr. Sweet and his colleagues at BOLD have developed and perfected. In addition, Dr. Sweet dedicates much of his time to training members of the justice system – law enforcement officers, lawyers, judges.

Also founded by Dr. Sweet, the British Columbia Forensic Odontology Response Team (BC-FORT) is the only trained group of responders capable of handling a mass disaster in Canada or on behalf of Canadians that perish outside its borders.

Dr. Sweet has established numerous formal and informal working relationships with various police agencies including the RCMP both in British Columbia and at the Federal level. He has worked with police and Coroner's in British Columbia and other provinces to develop protocols for evidence collection and secure transfer to his laboratory at the University of British Columbia. This has not occurred in any other Canadian jurisdiction, nor to my knowledge elsewhere in North America or the world.

Dr. Sweet's expertise has been utilized worldwide. He has been identified by the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva as one of the world's leading forensic odontologists. As such, Dr. Sweet has been appointed to the committee to help develop a protocol for use during investigations into war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Internationally Dr. Sweet has been named Chief Scientific Officer for the identification section of INTERPOL. This is a major accomplishment extending beyond dentistry to include all of the forensic identification scientists. No other Canadian has held such a position in INTERPOL.

Dr. Sweet's combined background in forensic dentistry and forensic medicine, along with his specialization in DNA evidence, provide the expertise to identify bodies found at mass fatality sites. The Red Cross has commenced a world-wide program entitled "The Missing" in which forensic odontologists and other experts are attempting to provide answers to the families of the persons still missing in various theatres of war, including Kosovo, Bosnia, Croatia, Rwanda, Nigeria, East Timor, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan.

Dr. Sweet also presented to the Pennsylvania Dental Identification Team in Harrisburg, PA. who responded to the crash of Flight 93 in Somerset County, PA on September 11th. He helped to develop a secure web-based victim identification database to assist with the Tsunami disaster in Southeast Asia in 2004. Dr. Sweet worked quickly to develop this new technology and assist those on the ground identifying missing victims. This included not only the Canadian victims, but also supported other countries efforts in identification.

Dr. Sweet is a seven-time recipient of the UBC Faculty of Dentistry award for meritorious service. This spans three decades (1988 to 2006). It is unheard of for someone to be consistently recognized at the intervals and over the long haul as has Dr. Sweet.

The UBC Faculty of Dentistry is proud to have such an outstanding citizen and devoted scientist as part of its academic community. Dr. Sweet's passion, proficiency and commitment in the field of Forensic Odontology is extraordinary.

The UBC Faculty of Dentistry is the only dental school in British Columbia. Established in 1962, the Faculty of Dentistry has recently marked the 40th anniversary of graduating dentists. The majority of DMD graduates build careers in oral healthcare as general practitioners, most staying in British Columbia. The Faculty of Dentistry also offers studies in a variety of advanced dental education and specialty programs, research as well as a Dental Hygiene Degree Program.