

Dental Characteristics Help Identify Disaster Victims

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YOGYAKARTA - Everyone has an identity that differs them from another. Individual identity has legal aspects, for example, the body of someone dying due to crimes should be identified for insurance claim, inheritance, right and duty as member of community. There are some identification methods, including visual identification, private property identification, fingerprints, dental characteristics and DNA identification. Among them, DNA and dental characteristics have high individual validity.

Especially, dental characteristics method is known to be very helpful in Disaster Victim Identification (DVI). One of those, it is the identification of Merapi disaster victims in 2010. Although most of the victims were burned due to pyroclastic flows at a 600 Celcius degree of heat, but since the dents were protected by cheeks and lips, dental morphology is intact so it can be used for identification purposes.

"Forensic dental area is very important in identifying individuals in disasters with mass casualties, because over 59% of identification results are obtained from dental and oral examination, said forensic dental expert from Universitas Padjajaran, Prof. Dr. drg. Rachman Ardan at scientific seminar 'Smart Dentistry 2011' in the 63th Anniversary celebration of Faculty of Dentistry UGM on Thursday (3/3).

Dental characteristics identification is done by determining unique characteristics of an individual by comparing postmortem data and premortem data. But there are limited number of people doing dental checks, causing problems for forensic dental expert to do identification. "Most of our people are still reluctant to have their dents checked."

Similar opinion was raised by forensic dental expert of UGM, drg. Sara Afari Gadro, M.Kes , who said that dental identification data are very helpful in identification of bodies, victims of Mt. Merapi eruption. Some 25 bodies were identified after the 27 October eruption, but in the second eruption



in early November, of 103 bodies being given identification process, only 59 could be fully identified. “The second eruption was much bigger, causing many bodies broken and fragmented, hence difficult identification,” he said.

Although dental identification has been made, but the limited premortem data have made it difficult. “Most don't have premortem data, many have postmortem data only,” she said. Based on this experience, Afari considered it important for dentists to have medical records of a patient, including their dental records.

Head of Sub-Section of Riau Police office, drg. Hadi Widjanarko, said that someone's dents are almost similar to the dents of other 2 million people, therefore, dental records when someone is alive is very important. At the police office, dental identification is one of primary identification methods apart from fingerprints and DNA test. “Dental identification is very helpful in investigation process and the decisions of dental forensic team can be legally accounted for,” he said.

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