

WG 6 (Forensic Pathology)

Ethical Considerations in Forensic Identification and Investigation During the Iron Swords War

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The "Iron Swords" war began with a Hamas attack on Israel, leading to significant civilian casualties and over 900 military fatalities. This conflict necessitated the full activation of Unit 6017, the Israeli Defense Forces casualty identification unit of the medical corps, together with the casualty unit of the military rabbinate, responsible for both casualty identification and operational investigation. While existing literature predominantly focuses on the ethical aspects of casualty identification in civilian contexts or mass disasters, this lecture uniquely explores the ethical considerations specific to Unit 6017's operations during the "Iron Swords" war, including the integration of operational investigation with standard bioethical concerns and Jewish laws.

The lecture reviews the medical, ethical, and operational principles guiding the casualty identification process and the investigation of death circumstances, using Unit 6017's role in the "Iron Swords" war as a case study.

Unit 6017 operates under medical ethics, religious ethics principles, such as respect for the deceased and the family's rights, while also adhering to IDF values, necessitating operational investigations that may delay funerals and pose risks to the unit in complex situations.

The unit's work requires balancing ethical principles with military obligations, especially in challenging scenarios involving medical investigations, informed consent, staff safety, and timely burial.

This lecture examines how Unit 6017 navigated the ethical complexities of its dual role, balancing bioethical considerations with military demands during the "Iron Swords" war.

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Identification of Casualties Under Fire

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This lecture will address the unique characteristics of the Iron Swords War, focusing on the operational and national imperative to recover hostages, including those who are no longer alive.

We will present the need that arose during the conflict to rule out the presence of Israeli casualties among bodies located in enemy territory.

The discussion will explore several alternative methods for casualty identification outside the walls of the national/military casualty identification center, emphasizing the advantages and limitations of each approach.

We will introduce the operational concept and, consequently, the system developed during the war for dental identification in enemy territory—a simple, fast, and efficient system designed for frontline identification, even under hostile conditions.