



Criminalistics Section – 2004

B75 Surviving the Stigma of a Wrongful Conviction Case

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After attending this presentation, the participant will understand that following a crisis over a wrongful conviction it is possible to restore the confidence of the justice system and the capability of the forensic laboratory.

In 1996 the Ontario Government called a Commission of Inquiry into the wrongful murder conviction of Guy Paul Morin, in which hair and fiber evidence played a pivotal role. As a result of that Inquiry the Centre of Forensic Sciences shared a considerable amount of blame with its justice system partners; the staff of the Centre, who had seen themselves as independent and impartial participants in the criminal justice process, were particularly affected. Following the Inquiry, the Centre became a focus of the media, the defense bar and even trial judges in proceedings involving all of the service disciplines, not solely hair and fiber. At the same time, though, there was a silver lining to this dark cloud, which was the opportunity for change and improvement.

This presentation will relate how we were able to secure the support of Government to commit resources, a chronic problem for forensic laboratories, to implement change in management practices and accountability, quality assurance systems and reporting practices. By emphasizing our objectivity as scientists, our openness to external scrutiny with our client groups through the creation of an advisory body comprised of members of the whole justice community - investigators, prosecutors, defense counsel, judiciary, and scientists - and a commitment to quality, we have been able to restore the confidence that our organization has traditionally enjoyed.

Wrongful Conviction, Quality, Organization Change