



Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences Section – 2006

I5 Interdisciplinary Peer-Review in Action

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the application of an optimized, multidisciplinary peer-review protocol in forensic evaluations.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by demonstrating the integration of multiple interrelated scientific disciplines affording the opportunity for rigorous, thorough evaluations for complex forensic questions.

Increasing attention has been given to the potential imperfections of expert testimony, with dishonesty and bias all too prevalent in courts today. Accountability and oversight have inspired stipulations for peer-review in legislation. Expert testimony remains, however, largely the work of solitary consultants.

Mimicking the medical model, peer-review, the process by which scientists review and vet the findings of a primary physician, has emerged as a mechanism that can enhance diligence, reduce potential bias and ensure that opinions are reflective of scientific standards.

The authors have optimized a peer-review protocol for forensic evaluations, in which clinicians with complementary areas of expertise provide oversight to the examination and conclusions of a same-specialty primary examiner.

Recently, however, the advantage of interdisciplinary peer review has been recognized: the advantage of interdisciplinary peer-review: wherein peer-reviewers in multiple interrelated fields of relevance to a given case provide oversight to ensure that an evaluation is thorough and reflective of the standards of all fields overlapped.

To illustrate this application, *the authors* will present a case study of an investigation into the death of a 33-year-old man with a history of panic disorder and benzodiazepine dependence who died suddenly while in a correctional facility. In this case, the primary examiner is a pathologist, peer-reviewed by a toxicologist and psychopharmacologist. This unique collaborative approach enabled a complete inquiry into the scientific truths of this complex case with medical certainty, providing the confidence of a "last word" to the court.

Forensic Evaluation, Death Investigation, Multidisciplinary