



D11 Cognitive Contamination in Medicolegal Death Investigations

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After attending this presentation, attendees will recognize the affects of biases and heuristics in medicolegal death investigations.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing awareness of the internal and external factors that influence medicolegal death investigations and providing techniques to mitigate those destructive influences.

Independence and objectivity are the most important values in medicolegal death investigations. Preliminary information provided by law enforcement officials, witnesses, and family members can affect an investigator's observations. These external sources in conjunction with internal processing of information can mislead or damage an investigation. Internal processing includes "heuristic thinking" which are simple mental shortcuts ("rules of thumb") used to comprehend a large amount of information in an efficient (quick and dirty) manner.

All forensic investigations, especially medicolegal death investigations, are influenced by conformity effects, confirmatory biases, and availability and representative heuristics. In order to maintain independence and objectivity, an investigator must not only have awareness of biases and heuristics, but institute investigative techniques to mitigate these influences. A case example will be used to illustrate how biases and heuristics affect medicolegal death scene investigations.

Medicolegal Death Investigations, Cognitive Contamination, Bias