E25 Research on Forensic Science Error Rates Under Ideal Conditions and Under the Conditions of Practice

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After attending this presentation, attendees will learn about the difficulties of doing research on error rates under ideal conditions, and also the difficulties of doing research about error rates prevailing under the non-ideal conditions of real practice.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by leading to changes in normal practice to obviate the need for research about error rates under non-ideal conditions of practice.

Research concerning "error rates" in the forensic identification disciplines that rely centrally on human evaluation is very important, but it can help only if a program of research is undertaken on a task-specific level consistent with the demands of *Kumho Tire v. Carmichael* (which may have been what the NAS Committee had in mind by the use of the phrase "relevant error rates"). However, it is too early to tell whether the NAS Report will foster such research, or whether it has created an environment where a lot of "faux research" will be undertaken, designed and directed toward giving the appearance of data blessing the status quo (and whether such research will absorb most of any research money newly made available by virtue of a kind of research program "Gresham's law"). Finally, the research that can be done on error rates under ideal conditions is the easiest part of the task. It is much harder to do research on error rates under normal conditions of practice, which are of course the only truly meaningful ones. What is needed is not to await such research, but to adopt sequential unmasking protocols to eliminate the need for such research by bringing the conditions of practice more in line with the ideal.

Research, Error Rates, Forensic Science

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