



D3 The Need for Mandatory Continuing Education for Forensic Science Professionals

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the need for mandatory continuing education requirements for any person practicing in the field of forensic science.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by highlighting the importance of continuing education for all forensic science practitioners.

Other professions such as doctors and lawyers have continuing education requirements that are mandatory in order to continue practicing in the field. The information presented will show that continuing education should be mandatory in the forensic field like other professions because the level of knowledge across the different disciplines is ranging due to the lack of continuing education available. Some continuing education for forensic professionals is currently offered, yet the cost and availability may cause some professionals to not be able to attend.

Based on data gathered from over 1,000 forensic practitioners at four training programs over three years, the continuing professional education needs of the forensic industry are going unmet. The forensic science community is interested in gaining more knowledge and training, but opportunities for this education vary greatly. For example, some professionals were able to attend five different training programs in one year while others were only able to attend one; this does not account, of course, for those who were not able to attend any. Also, professionals had to use personal time off or personal funds to attend continuing education opportunities. Gathering data from professionals employed by agencies with differing training resources was important because the data reflects the range of continuing education courses being received by forensic professionals and how attendance was funded for these and other programs.

In the National Academy of Science report, *Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States: A Path Forward*, the need for forensic science continuing education was emphatic. No mandatory standardized continuing education requirements exist in the forensic industry. Although, individual certifying or accrediting bodies may require continuing education, these are not universally accepted, even within specific disciplines. If all forensic scientists were required to gain a certification or license in order to practice their profession, mandatory continuing education should be part of the certification or license renewal process.

Mandatory continuing education for professionals is achievable; doctors, teachers, and lawyers are required to obtain continuing education to retain their licenses or certification. Continuing education requirements vary by state but some are national. The same could hold true for forensic professionals. As a science-based industry, the continuing development and attainment of knowledge and skills is critical to assure forensic work is being performed correctly and accurately using validated techniques and standards. By requiring all forensic scientists to gain a set number of hours of continuing education every year, for example, the entire field of forensic science would be strengthened.

After compiling the data from four continuing education programs, reviewing other professional groups' continuing education requirements and reviewing *Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States: A Path Forward*, the need for mandatory forensic science continuing education is clear. By pursuing mandatory continuing education, professionals need to agree on what requirements are most important to the field. With industry consensus, policies by local and national agencies could follow the guidelines and funding agencies could then assist with sponsorship and resources.

Continuing Education, Training,

Professional Development