



### **D48 Forensic Awareness for Emergency Department Staff**

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand key concepts used to successfully teach emergency department staff the significance of their observations, documentation, and actions during the care of patients under conditions of potential forensic significance.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by offering a sample curriculum for use in future trainings of emergency department staff.

Physicians, nurses, and technicians working in an Emergency Department (ED) commonly participate in situations of forensic significance and their contributions have the potential to dramatically alter the course of an investigation. The goal of this training is to elevate participants from a level of unconscious participation/obstruction to at least a level of basic forensic awareness in commonly encountered situations. The actions and observations of ED personnel can be particularly important in cases involving traumatic injury, neglect, overdose, Apparent Life-Threatening Events (ALTEs) in children, and any type of death investigation.

Though patient care must never be compromised in an effort to protect evidence, medical staff can be successfully trained to maintain a level of forensic awareness while providing care. The first step toward improving forensic awareness in the ED setting is to make clear the value of initial observations/documentation and the potential ramifications of alteration to the body and related items. Information gathered during initial interactions can be of great value, not only to any subsequent investigation, but also to the provision of medical care. Because medical professionals receive little education regarding the pivotal role they may play in cases of medicolegal significance, this type of in-service education may be essential to the ED as a whole. A more thorough and accurate understanding of the circumstances surrounding a patient's arrival at the ED can only improve patient outcomes. In addition, providing this type of training decreases the likelihood that information will be lost or destroyed due to a mere lack of knowledge.

For this training to be effective, ED staff must receive information they interpret as relevant and realistic. Instructors of this curriculum should have experience in both ED and medicolegal settings. ED experience provides the instructor with an appreciation for structural barriers, as perceived by medical staff, and fluency in the "medical shorthand" care providers generally use to communicate. Each experience increases the likelihood of teacher-student dialogue and advanced problem-solving. Case reviews are an essential component of the medicolegal portion of this training and will allow attendees to better appreciate and personalize the information being given.

Improving forensic awareness in ED staff will not only improve efficiency and accuracy of subsequent forensic investigation, but also enhance patient care. While the primary obligation of the medical staff is to the health and safety of their patients, the patient and greater community are better served when forensic awareness is maintained. This presentation will review cases in which ED staff both aided and hindered forensic investigations. Examples of improved outcomes following this training approach will also be offered.

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#### **Evidence, Medical, Training**