



Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences Section - 2014

143 Forensic Psychiatric Consultation to the Child Death Review Committee of Oakland County, Michigan

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After attending this presentation, attendees will learn how a forensic psychiatrist consultant to a county child death review committee approaches his role and responsibilities on an interdisciplinary group made up of individuals representing varied backgrounds and interests (i.e., public health, education, law, medicine, criminal justice, psychology, and other behavioral sciences).

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing information and experiences from a forensic psychiatric perspective about the statutory origin and history of child death review committees in Michigan, the function of the Oakland County Child Death Review Committee (CDR) in particular, and examples of representative cases reviewed with emphasis on the consultative role in child suicides, accidental deaths, cases of undetermined manners of death, and homicides.

Society pays special attention to the deaths of children. Almost all cultures have an emotional investment in children and a sense of responsibility to ensure their well-being. When child deaths occur, there is a need to determine what caused the event and how it could have been prevented. At the child death review committee level, a coalition of specialists convenes to discuss all child deaths in a closed, confidential manner that is restricted from public view.

Not all child death review committees have forensic psychiatrist consultants, and not many forensic psychiatrists provide consultation to child death review committees. When present, the forensic psychiatrist serves an important function to the committee as a physician and as a specialist trained in psychiatry and forensic medicine. These qualifications allow the forensic psychiatrist to interface effectively with professionals from varied backgrounds: physicians; behavioral specialists; prosecutors; law enforcement; and others. The result of the collaborative environment serves to promote a better understanding of the circumstances of the child's death as well as an awareness of issues in fostering prevention and education in the community. Members of the CDR indicate that input from the forensic psychiatrist consultant with regard to suicide is critical for the proper assessment of such cases. Suicide is a function of a number of factors, including socioeconomic, intrapersonal and interpersonal stress, cultural mores, social forces, and physical and mental conditions.¹ Two or three brief CDR case examples will be presented to the audience to provide a basis for discussion of the consultative role of the forensic psychiatrist.

In summary, the interdisciplinary members of the CDR represent areas of medicine, law, social services, and law enforcement, and endeavor to provide a more complete understanding of factors which contribute to child deaths. As a result of training, background, and experience, the forensic psychiatric consultant provides important and useful perspectives which may help to integrate other multidisciplinary viewpoints in the committee's work.

Reference:

1. Carson AJ, Cavanagh JTO, Lawrie SM, & Sharpe M. Psychological Autopsy Studies of Suicide: A Systematic Review. *Psychological Medicine* 2003;33(3):395-405.
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Child, Death, Interdisciplinary