



E109 The Face of the Laboratory: Creating and Implementing a Client Services and Case Management Division

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand support roles in a laboratory setting, the impact those roles have within the laboratory, and the meaning of providing quality customer service to internal and external clients.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating how to create and manage a cohesive laboratory support system that effectively incorporates case management and customer service.

Most laboratories run by law enforcement agencies are supported by evidence technicians, custodians of records, administrative assistants, and laboratory assistants. Traditionally, these support roles were dispersed throughout the laboratory, each working independently rather than cohesively. For example, there may be one evidence technician per individual section (i.e., biology, firearms, controlled substances, etc.), while smaller law enforcement agencies may only have one evidence technician or property clerk responsible for retrieving and storing evidence. The Houston Forensic Science Center (HFSC) had to create its own support system once the laboratory transitioned away from law enforcement management.

As the crime laboratory evolved, so has the Client Services and Case Management (CS/CM) Division created by HFSC. CS/CM sets itself apart by incorporating all laboratory support roles into a unified, structured division. The division plays an integral role in internal case management, but a significant portion of the group is dedicated to external support, popularly referred to as customer service. Currently, the CS/CM division's responsibilities include, but are not limited to: administrative support, laboratory support, customer service, record management, and receiving and supply management. Many of the division's specialists juggle multiple job functions, unlike more traditional laboratory units. The goal is to have a cohesive division with interchangeable experience and responsibility by diversifying the staffs' knowledge and widening its support capabilities.

As an independent local government corporation, HFSC seeks to improve its relationships with clients. This includes their main client, the Houston Police Department, as well as internal personnel, other law enforcement agencies, defense attorneys, and the district attorney's office. Furthermore, HFSC is determined to gain the public's trust and squash the perception that forensic laboratories favor the prosecution. CS/CM assists HFSC in achieving this goal by ensuring transparency, providing all clients documents and records, and working to reduce, and hopefully eliminate, cognitive bias. CS/CM acts as the liaison between the outside world and the laboratory, shielding analysts from unnecessary information that will not assist in the analysis of evidence. The division also relays pertinent information to the external client in an efficient manner.

By creating a division similar to CS/CM, a laboratory's administrative functions, basic duties, and day-to-day tasks can be removed from the analysts and given to a managed group of individuals. The greatest impact of this is creating more time for the analysts to perform laboratory functions and focus on evidence analysis. Attendees of the presentation will learn how valuable an asset a division similar to CS/CM can be to a laboratory's daily functioning. CS/CM assists in producing quicker responses and more efficient processes. This, in turn, leads to quicker turnaround times and smaller backlogs.



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Customer Service, Client, Support