



B166 Supplementing Forensic Science Services With Research, Training, and Mentoring: Employing Quality Management Personnel to Meet an Organization’s Continuous Education Program Goals

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After attending this presentation, attendees will have a reference model of quality management staff employed to manage continuous education programs in a forensic science organization.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing knowledge of a system to meet the continuous education and scientific research needs of a combined medical examiner and crime laboratory institute.

With a focus on casework, backlogs, and turnaround times, many forensic science laboratories are unable to commit to the development of research projects or programs to mentor future forensic scientists. Time is a limiting factor to consider if an organization strives to fulfill an objective of maintaining a connection between forensic science practitioners and the broader scientific community.

The Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences (HCIFS) is an integrated medical examiner office and crime laboratory located in Houston, TX. The HCIFS organizational structure includes an independent Quality Management Division, which oversees the multiple quality systems throughout the entire organization. Based on a strategic goal to establish an academic environment for training in forensic science, HCIFS created a full-time Training and Development Manager position that reports directly to the Quality Director. HCIFS demonstrates dedication to diversity in the education of current practitioners, future forensic scientists, and forensic pathologists, while fostering a research culture through a variety of programs and also maintaining seven accreditations, including two dedicated to the education and training of forensic pathologists. The Training and Development Manager coordinates the activities in each of these programs and assesses training needs, organizes and administers professional development opportunities, coordinates training and research programs, and creates training programs to support the continuing education of the large percentage of staff who hold a certification in each of the diverse forensic disciplines.

Accredited by the Texas Medical Association for Continuing Medical Education (TMA-CME), HCIFS offers continuing medical education opportunities year-round, specifically designed to meet the unique knowledge, competence, and performance needs of forensic pathologists. HCIFS trains up to two forensic pathologists per year through their comprehensive and rigorous forensic pathology fellowship program, which is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME). Post-doctoral fellowship programs designed for advanced research and method development are maintained in three additional disciplines at the Institute — forensic anthropology, forensic genetics, and forensic toxicology. Additionally, medical students and medical residents can participate in a rotation through the forensic pathology division for education and training.

HCIFS offers an annual summer internship program through which students from United States academic institutions can apply to be an intern in a variety of different disciplines. Internship opportunities are offered with each of the forensic disciplines in the Institute, including: forensic anthropology, forensic entomology, forensic toxicology, drug chemistry, forensic genetics, trace evidence, firearms identification, forensic investigations, forensic emergency management, forensic imaging, and histology. The Institute also offers internship opportunities in the administrative branch, such as systems support and finance. The summer internship program offers a structured program where students apply their scientific knowledge to a structured research project, provide presentations of the results of those projects to HCIFS management and staff, and participate in professional development. Year-round internship opportunities are maintained through partnerships with local universities in the victim’s assistance section and the histology laboratory.

A unique opportunity for international medical examiners and forensic science practitioners is also available at HCIFS. Practitioners in the field of forensic science affiliated with academic or governmental institutions outside of the United States can apply to observe HCIFS methods and procedures as an information-sharing partnership.

The HCIFS hosts an annual “Topics in Forensic Sciences” (TIFS) conference. The TIFS conference is a multidisciplinary forum for information sharing with the medical, forensic science, legal, and law enforcement communities. During the TIFS conference, research is presented, procedures are illustrated, and best practices in methods are discussed.

The HCIFS supplements forensic science services with comprehensive training and maintains connection with the broader scientific community. By employing a Training and Development Manager in the Quality Management Division, the organization is able to maintain and coordinate training programs, research projects, and mentoring programs while complying with the standards set forth by multiple accreditation bodies.

Continuous Education, Quality Management, Training Programs