B157   Expert Forensic Testimony Training for Non-Analysts

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Learning Overview: The goal of this presentation is to inform attendees about non-conventional training opportunities and methods to best serve the criminal justice system and to provide details of such opportunities.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by enthusing, educating, and informing attendees in the importance of delivering forensic testimony training to a wide range of end-users and through diverse methods.

This presentation regards the forensic scientist's responsibility to be equipped and seek opportunities to adequately and appropriately inform and train all members of the criminal justice system, especially those who have a vested interest in the expert witnesses testimony. During the course of a forensic scientist's training program, which can often be very lengthy, much emphasis is rightly given over to the practical aspects of bench work, data interpretation, report writing, and review.

While the aforementioned topics are extremely necessary portions of the training program, this presentation will encompass the opinion that an area of training that could be much improved upon concerns expert witness testimony. Not only are the testifying scientists in need of robust and realistic training for such an occasion that can often be out of their comfort zone, but so too are all other end users of the forensic testimony to be given before the court. Often neglected within training programs are the needs of all people within the courtroom and justice system to understand the intent behind the presentation of potentially complex results, interpretations, and opinions being offered by the highly skilled and technically trained scientist. This presentation will address the shortfalls inherent when the forensic science provider conducts their own internal witness training program that, within government laboratories, is generally tailored to prosecution lines of questioning. This is especially important during a time when the recent emphasis on attempting to minimize bias within the field is at the forefront of forensic conversation.

A universal training or teaching course is inadequate to fulfill the very different needs of the analyst, Law Enforcement Agency (LEA) officer, prosecution attorney, defense attorney, judge, and the general public (jury pool). The analyst may well be among the best equipped to assist the understanding of each of these contributors to justice, and this presentation will give examples and suggestions of how a crucial understanding may be instilled upon all stakeholders with clarity, succinctness, and even a touch of levity.

A unique position within the courtroom is held by the judge whose role within that arena and the judicial system is critical to the fair outcome of any legal hearing or trial proceeding. With such a burden comes the expectation by the court for a judge to make well-informed and just decisions during the admission of testimony. This presentation will additionally focus on the opportunities that exist for laboratory personnel to input in the continuous education of judges. Participation at this level of education is extremely beneficial to the individual judges, scientists, and the wider justice system. However, this opportunity is seldom taken; therefore, much encouragement will be given during this presentation toward greater involvement at this level.

Court Testimony, Education, Training