

Position Paper on Forensic Interviewer Credentialing

The National Children's Advocacy Center has been involved over the years in discussions regarding the strengths and challenges of various approaches aimed toward increasing the skills and performance of forensic interviewers and acknowledging their expertise.

One proposal has been the establishment of a credentialing process for forensic interviewers in an effort to increase the professionalism and status of forensic interviewers in the courts and with multidisciplinary teams. This proposal recommends a tiered model to address basic training, knowledge, participation in peer review, ongoing training, successful completion of a written examination, number of interviews conducted, and a review by a panel of experts as designed by the credentialing body. At one point it was suggested that any organization providing credentialing should consist primarily, if not exclusively, of forensic interviewers. There is not yet a national organization consisting only of forensic interviewers, nor is there a national organization with a forensic interviewing subsection. The current credentialing body that has emerged is not supported by numerous nationally-recognized child abuse experts and organizations in the United States.

There are unresolved issues as to the necessary components of forensic interviewing protocols; and the basic education, training, and knowledge requirements for forensic interviewers. In 2011 the NCAC brought together numerous nationally-recognized forensic training programs in the United States to formally consolidate the existing knowledge and perspectives on the generally accepted practices for those conducting forensic interviews with children regarding allegations of abuse or exposure to violence. This paper, scheduled to be released in 2015 is intended to support all forensic interviewers who are conducting and pursuing ethical and competent practice by serving as a unifying treatise for the numerous nationally-recognized forensic training programs in the United States.

While the NCAC promotes the idea of using dedicated staff to conduct forensic interviews, the reality is that many communities do not have Children's Advocacy Centers nor monies to fund a

dedicated forensic interviewer position. At present, many interviews are conducted by law enforcement or child protective service workers who have received forensic interview training. Individuals providing forensic interviews usually do so as part of a multidisciplinary team response to a child abuse allegation, and thus must rely on the interagency collaboration to be effective. As such, any decision made which will affect the ability of investigators to conduct forensic interviews should be made with full input from potential agencies affected.

It has been proposed that credentialing will increase an interviewer's expertise in forensic interviewing, allowing them to be more easily qualified as an expert witness. Research has demonstrated that forensic interview training increases participants' knowledge base but does not translate to improved practice in the field. Credentialing which is dependent on an examination testing general knowledge is not a true indicator of a person's qualifications or competence to conduct a forensic interview. Supervision, mentoring, appropriate peer review, and ongoing training are necessary components to shape behaviors, hone skills, and maintain quality in forensic interviewing. While there are multiple opportunities available for participation in regional, state, and national peer reviews, continuing education, and various venues for discussion and communication with other forensic interviewers, the field is early in the stages of development of feedback tools, guidelines, and protocols which will insure that feedback and supervision is effective and produces the desired outcome. These are all necessary components to increasing the professionalism and status of forensic interviewers.

Until the field categorically defines what constitutes forensic interviewing best practice and how to achieve this best practice, and is prepared to offer adequate resources and guidance to supervisors and peer review facilitators, the NCAC believes it is premature to support credentialing of forensic interviewers.

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