

GUEST EDITORIAL



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The Last Quarter

As we move into the last quarter of the 20th century, it is time perhaps to pause and reflect upon where we have been and where we are going. Forensic science has moved at a tremendous pace since 1900. Modern psychiatry, blood grouping, and fingerprints were just beginning to be taken seriously at the turn of the century. The second quarter of the century witnessed the establishment of many of our leading laboratories and the founding of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, the "Voice of Forensic Science." The third quarter might be typified as the era of concentration on techniques and instrumentation. In three quarters of a century, forensic science has come a long way. Activities in the forensic field that were, in the beginning, perhaps simply jobs, have become careers, and in some cases have become professions.

The progress made is certainly impressive considering the distance travelled in so short a time, but we still lag behind other occupational groups. With centuries behind them, medicine, teaching, and law are certainly more organized and more professional than the specialists involved in the forensic sciences. When one views the weird and fascinating array of individuals allowed to testify in our courts of law as expert witnesses, with widely varying backgrounds and paths to expertise, it is no wonder that not all aspects of the forensic sciences are truly professionalized. The forensic sciences do lack a coordinated approach to formal education, training, testing, certification, and monitoring of the expert witnesses in the United States.

The next 25 years are going to bring fundamental changes to the forensic sciences. Although new instrumentation will be found and techniques will be improved, the real changes will be, and should be, on the "people side" of the forensic sciences. Hopefully, the many pressures existing today for more rapid professionalization will result in the establishment of proper institutions for the education and training of forensic scientists. One can anticipate that public or private boards will be created to handle the accreditation of forensic practitioners and that the judicial system will be modified so that only certified forensic scientists are allowed to testify as experts in courts of law. The model has been established in other professions for the education and evaluation of practitioners; forensic science need only follow the paths trod by others who came before us.

As we come into the maturity of forensic science, it is not too much to hope that as we become more professional, the contributions of the forensic scientists will become better known and finances will become available, as they are in other professions, so that research institutes can be established in all the forensic sciences.

The indications are that the coming quarter century will bring many of these ideas to fruition. Hopefully, the American Academy of Forensic Sciences will be in the vanguard, leading the way to a more mature profession.