

## President's Editorial

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### Ethics First



As President of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, my goals have been to advance international cooperation in forensics and to ensure that we are operating our Academy to the highest ethical standards. Although these two goals may appear to be separate, I believe they are linked.

My experience in the world, particularly in developing countries, has demonstrated to me the fundamental role that the justice system plays in these countries and around the globe. An unbiased, equitable, and predictable justice system is a prerequisite

to any country being able to attract investment. What company, country or individual would be willing to invest significant amounts of money without guarantees of stability in both the criminal and civil justice systems? A strong justice system promotes the stability that allows economic growth, which then translates into money for education, health care, and other social programs.

Most of us who belong to the American Academy of Forensic Sciences are fortunate to come from countries where the fundamental role of justice is appreciated. We can therefore be an example to developing countries if we are operating in an ethical manner.

Our worst fear as forensic scientists is that we will play a negative role in a wrongful conviction case. Jurisdictions are increasingly recognizing the limited role that confessions and eyewitness identifications should play. The importance of forensic science is therefore growing in the courts but with this increased importance comes increased scrutiny. Both in the workplace and in our professional organizations such as the Academy we must assure ourselves that ethics is the foundation by which we do our job. For this reason I have asked the Ethics Committee and the Long Term Policy Committee to jointly revise the ethics policies and procedures of the Academy. We need to clearly define for our members what is considered to be an ethics violation and to develop open, transparent and predicable methods of investigation of ethics violation allegations. Even in our preliminary discussions we recognize this is easier said than done but it is essential that we make the effort. This should not be a one time project but rather a constant work in progress. With our multidisciplinary membership which includes scientists, doctors, dentists, engineers, and lawyers the Academy is well positioned to lead the way in establishing high ethical standards. We owe ourselves as individuals, our professions, and our countries no less.

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