

EDITORIAL

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President's Editorial—Fostering Advancements in Forensic Science

The American Academy of Forensic Sciences was founded in 1948 as an organization devoted to the improvement, administration, and achievement of justice through the application of science to the processes of law. The Constitution of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences adopted in 1950 states the following:

“The objects and purposes of this Academy shall be:

1. To promote the use of scientific methods and knowledge in the solution of legal problems and controversies.
2. To develop and extend a better understanding of the application of legal doctrines to scientific professions.
3. To improve professional qualifications of scientists engaged in the assistance of the courts and attorneys.
4. To plan, organize, and administer meetings, reports, and other projects for the stimulation and advancement of the above purposes, and the standardizations of scientific techniques, tests, and criteria.”

While the objectives and purposes were adopted nearly 60 years ago, they remain applicable as the Academy continues to thrive as the leading international professional society devoted to education and practice in the field of forensic sciences. Forensic science findings are regularly used by law enforcement agencies and the judicial system.

In the past decade with the rapid advancement of science and technology, there has been a considerable change in the manner in which the forensic scientist fosters truth and justice. These changes include advances in DNA profiling, the use of bench-top tandem mass spectrometers in trace and toxicological analysis, and computer-aided analysis of data. In addition, an increased emphasis on professional standardization, accreditation of education and training programs, certification of personnel, and accreditation of laboratories have enhanced the value of forensic science.

Today, the forensic scientist works in a high profile, litigious profession and is called upon to testify in court proceedings including depositions, evidentiary hearings, and trials. While testimony is based on the principles of good forensic science and technology, errors have occurred. In recent years, there has been widespread local, national, and international media attention focusing on these errors, with little attention on scientific accomplishments or milestones, other than what is shown in the highly popularized fiction- and reality-based television and cable series.



Concern regarding the reliability of the current forensic science system in the U.S. has spurred numerous studies including one currently underway: “Identifying the Needs of the Forensic Sciences Community” by the National Academy of Sciences, which is addressing the present and future resource needs and assessing potential scientific advances of the forensic science community, as well as disseminating best practices and guidelines concerning forensic evidence.

The forensic sciences will unquestionably develop at a rapid pace with many advances in basic and applied science. Proactive interventions and measures including the dissemination of best practices and guidelines, the development of public policy and a master plan addressing resources and funding priorities, and the enhancement of support and funding in the area of forensic science practice, education, training, and research are urgently needed. With these in place, forensic science will flourish and truth and justice will prevail.

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