



Editorial for Forensic Sciences



I am very honored to write an editorial for the inaugural issue of Forensic Sciences: Methods and Techniques. This journal is highly needed and will serve its readers well by offering studies that offer depth on specific issues from a wide-range of topics in forensics. Such specific coverage of important topics is clearly seen in the first issue, so it is great to see such an exemplary group of studies are presented here “right out of the gate.”

The first article in this issue is research presented by Douglass A Orr and Alvi Castro regarding the use of Whatsapp Messenger on Android platform that might assist investigators to analyze communication data in forensic investigations. This study provides a guideline for investigators in using the database for determining which users contacted others, as well as when. Thus, a chronological sequence can be made toward discovering the exchanges, the location of the device at time of exchange, as well as content involved in such exchanges (including if attachments were involved, and possibly how to find them). Although there are specific needs for such a workstation, the authors give a detailed list of what is required to do such a search. A large dose of images is presented to help readers go about performing their own investigation into what exchanges were done, as well as a glossary of terms that are not commonly known by readers. The authors also present numerous images and text commentary for understanding what Field names are presented in the database, as well as their meaning and use. Clear examples are also given for interpretation in orientating the database. All of these guidelines and useful information for using the Whatsapp database has not been given by the previous forensic literature, so this should be extremely useful for readers of this journal. This will certainly help many investigators get a better feel for their cases, especially in terms of contacts and content of messages done closest to the time of a victim’s death/injury. In light of this study, researchers should consider presenting future studies that can produce similar guidelines/instructions on how to perform such investigations on other platforms.

Completely switching gears here, but in the next article Robert N Diotalevi and Judy Hoffman present the legal issues involving veterans’ needs for service dogs, which are still unclear, despite the need and usefulness of such canines. The authors report numerous anecdotal success stories, and there is little doubt that they help many of our veterans readjust to normal life, especially to deal with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, which is commonly found among veterans. The authors accurately point out that the legal issues have yet to be worked out, given the conundrum of the specific questions that are asked for service dog accommodation, as well as the various agencies and laws (such as the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act [2008] and Federal Air Carriers Act [2009]), that govern these regulations for service dogs. Ultimately, the authors conclude that legal advocacy for veterans and their service dogs requires further expanding of the legal

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processes that protect veterans (and other disabled individuals) and their service dogs, and hopefully this will help everyone, including the dogs, who are often shelter dogs destined for death. This study inherently calls for more scientific study on the benefits of service dogs, particularly in the area of PTSD among veterans.

The next article, by Sheri Jenkins Keenan and Jeffrey P Rush presents a qualitative study of 227 juvenile probation officers' perceptions regarding the nature and extent of mental health of juveniles moving through the justice system. Specifically, the authors emphasize the question of whether these officers considered mental health issues when making sentence recommendations. The authors used a sample from the Tri-State area, meaning Kentucky, Illinois, and Indiana, and surveyed the probation officers from those jurisdictions. Their findings were very interesting, and showed that 88% of the juvenile probation officers agreed that individuals in the juvenile justice system who experience mental illness has become an increasing problem, and furthermore, a majority reported that a very large number are "dual diagnoses," and that such cases seem to be getting worse. Such responses were repeated over and over in the qualitative responses to the survey. Although there were other mental illnesses listed, as you can read in the article, the most commonly reported mental illness disorders were, as expected, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). However, many of the juvenile probation officers reported that these two types of mental illness are likely being used as a crutch for the poor behavior by youths, and are not being well-diagnosed by doctors or other medical professionals who can make accurate diagnoses. Another common theme found in the qualitative responses, likely not a big surprise for our readers, was that it was the systemic failure of a family support system that exacerbates the mental health issues of juveniles in the system. Many other interesting findings were reported by the authors, such as 6% of officers who reported that they did not believe that mental health in the juvenile justice system was an issue, which is somewhat alarming given that it is quite certain that it is an important issue. Future studies on this topic should attempt to replicate the methods used by the authors in areas

outside the Tri-State area. It is very likely that similar results will be found showing the need to place more emphasis on mental health issues in juvenile justice system processing and treatment.

The final article in this issue is a very practical guide provided by Pamela Newell for interpreting and rewording the legalese typically used in court documents. Such rewording is advised by the authors for readers who are writing forensic reports for various court proceedings, such as those including competency hearings, insanity defenses, and juvenile court and custody hearings. The author provides a very pragmatic guide for understanding the oftentimes complicated legal terms used, as well as what they really mean in common English words, as well as the equivalent terms that should likely be used in substitution in lieu of such legalese. In the early portion of the article, Newell presents an excellent analogy of the well-known story of Jack and Jill as given in complicated in legal terms and phrases that can essentially make a very simple story into a conundrum for most persons who are processed in court. Thus, the author emphasizes how straightforward and clear most legal forms can (and should) be if they are simply written in common English. Further, the author provides an abbreviated glossary of various legal terms used and their recommendations for substitutions for them, and break some of them into sections to advise in particular court processes, such as juvenile court and competency hearings. Overall, this article provides an essential guide for writing court reports in a more concise and clear way to help all parties in court proceedings, which most of our readers will find make their reports to the court far more effective in persuading their argument of the rationale for what they are stating and/or recommending in the cases they assess.

Readers will likely not be surprised that all of these articles were processed through an extensive peer-review process to ensure that each study is meticulous in presenting the readers of *Forensic Sciences: Methods and Techniques* journal with the most robust and accurate information in the discipline. I hope you all enjoy reading these articles, and hope you get as much as information from them as I did.