

# The Case for the Credentialing of Forensic Interviewers

Michael L. Haney, PhD, Victor I. Vieth, JD, Hector M. Campos, MSW, LCSW

## Introduction

A number of child protection leaders and organizations have held discussions or even offered proposals for the credentialing or certification of forensic interviewers. For example, the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC) has recently issued a statement on the development of a Diplomate status for forensic interviewers (APSAC, 2010). APSAC has worked with national partners who provide training and research in the discipline of forensic interviewing and with a number of state forensic interview training programs.

In 2007, with the assistance of the American Prosecutors Research Institute, APSAC conducted a national survey of front-line child protection professionals. Of the 589 professionals responding to the survey, 88.9% agreed or strongly agreed that the “creation of a Diplomate program in child forensic interviewing is beneficial to the field” (Haney, Conte, Berson, & MacFarlane, 2008). Only 8.7% of the respondents were neutral to the idea, and only 2.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed. A solid majority of the respondents believed that a Diplomate program should recognize the achievement of advanced standards (77.9%), should be based on years of experience (58.1%), and should require continuing education (91.8%). Nearly 90% of the child protection professionals expressed confidence that if front-line forensic interviewers are involved in the development of the Diplomate program, and if the program develops gradually and is based on research that it “is a good idea for the field.” However, 60% of the respondents expressed the view that a Diplomate status, standing alone, “would negatively impact the perceived competence of interviewers who do not have Diplomate status.”

In keeping with these results and myriad discussions, Dr. Mike Haney gave several national presentations suggesting the development of a national organization of forensic interviewers that will establish a base floor for all forensic interviewers but will support these professionals in reaching much more advanced standards (Haney et al., 2008). Dr. Haney suggested this membership organization be affiliated with APSAC and that it develop a code of ethics for forensic interviewers. Although APSAC has not yet formally endorsed this concept, it is one of several possibilities being considered in the long term.

At an APSAC forum on credentialing held in San Diego in January of 2008, the National Child Protection Training Center (NCPTC) distributed a paper proposing a multi-tiered credentialing process with Diplomate status as the top tier (Vieth, 2010). In that paper, NCPTC also proposed that front-line forensic interviewers be responsible for developing standards in the field, including the development of an ethical code. In a letter to APSAC in 2009, 13 of the 16 *ChildFirst/Finding Words* state forensic interview training courses expressed support for a multi-tiered credentialing process as proposed by NCPTC.

The National Association of Certified Child Forensic Interviewers (NACCFI) is another organization that has proposed the development of standards for the field of forensic interviewing. Specifically, NACCFI has proposed a certification of forensic interviewers who have completed recognized forensic interview training programs, who are actively engaged in the work of forensic interviewing, who are participating in peer review, who agree to adhere to a code of ethics, and who pass a competency examination.

There are many similarities among the NCPTC, NACCFI, and Haney proposals. Accordingly, Dr. Haney and leaders from NCPTC and NACCFI worked together to harmonize these ideas and develop a multi-tiered credentialing proposal that recognizes basic standards for the field but also allows forensic interviewers to grow professionally. The multi-tiered credentialing proposal was later presented at two national conferences: the “When Words Matter” conference in Savannah, Georgia, and at the “Dallas Crimes Against Children” conference in 2010. For the forensic interviewers and child protection professionals who could not attend these presentations, the workshop was also offered online to approximately 500 child protection professionals. NACCFI also developed an online survey which NCPTC distributed to an e-mail list of over 9,000 front-line child protection professionals.

This paper provides an outline of the multi-tiered credentialing process NACCFI proposes, summarizes the response from front-line professionals who responded to the NACCFI survey on credentialing, offers some thoughts on the benefits of a credentialing process, and responds to some of the concerns raised by several national leaders as well as front-line professionals.



## The NACCFI Multi-tiered Credentialing Process

As a starting point for the discussion, we present the outline of the multi-tiered credentialing process, which is similar to what NCPTC proposed at an ASPAC forum and which has largely been adopted by NACCFI. This outline is not necessarily the final proposal because, at the time of this writing, NACCFI continues to receive input from the field. However, the proposal is offered here simply to give some context to the discussion and to otherwise facilitate a more meaningful dialogue. Readers are advised to visit the NACCFI web site for details of the proposal and for updates on the process.

### 1. Basic forensic interviewing credential

To create uniformity in the field, the basic credential should be compatible with the forensic interviewing credentials currently in place for Children's Advocacy Centers (CAC) accredited by the National Children's Alliance (NCA). NCA requires that forensic interviewers working at a CAC successfully complete 40 hours of state or nationally recognized forensic interview training or, at the very least, that these interviewers document "satisfactory completion of competency-based child abuse forensic interview training that includes child development" (NCA, 2008). Moreover, other MDT members must be "routinely present" for the interviews, and

interviewers must participate in a "formalized peer review process." NACCFI proposes a compatible standard for all forensic interviewers, whether or not they conduct their work in a CAC. In addition, interviewers must also adhere to an ethical code developed for the field of forensic interviewers by the forensic interviewers themselves. Finally, these interviewers must have three letters of endorsement from multi-disciplinary team members.

### 2. Intermediate forensic interviewing credential

In addition to the completion of a state or nationally recognized forensic interviewing course, a forensic interviewer applying for this credential must complete an additional 40 hours of advanced course work on forensic interviewing, have conducted at least 25 forensic interviews, and have participated in at least one peer review process in which one or more of the applicants' interviews were critiqued. The forensic interviewer must again sign an acknowledgment of ethical guidelines pertaining to this work, and his or her agreement to abide by these guidelines. Finally, the interviewer must take and complete a nationally accepted examination documenting that the interviewer has acquired basic knowledge relevant to forensic interviewing.

### 3. Advanced forensic interviewing credential

In addition to the basic forensic interview training, an applicant for this credential must have completed a minimum of 80 hours of advanced course work on forensic interviewing, have conducted at least 100 forensic interviews, and participate in a quarterly peer review process. The forensic interviewer must again sign the acknowledgment pertaining to ethical standards.

### 4. Diplomate in forensic interviewing

In addition to the completion of basic forensic interview training, an applicant for Diplomate status must have completed a minimum of 160 hours of advanced training on forensic interviewing. The applicant must have conducted a minimum of 500 forensic interviews and must document continued participation in a quarterly peer review process. The forensic interviewer must continue to acknowledge an understanding of and adherence to ethical guidelines. Finally, and most important, the applicant must submit three transcripts or videotapes of forensic interviews conducted in at least 3 different years, for blind review by an expert panel. The panel, appointed by the body overseeing the credentialing process, must consist of practicing forensic interviewers who have conducted a minimum of 500 forensic interviews and who utilize different forensic interviewing protocols. The reason for a panel of experts utilizing different protocols is to avoid a process that endorses primarily one model over another but adopt one that instead focuses on acceptable practices in the field of forensic interviewing. The reason that the three transcripts or videotapes be from different years is to provide some evidence that the applicant has maintained excellence over an extended period of time.

## The NACCFI Survey

To assist front-line child protection professionals in offering input on the credentialing process, NACCFI developed an online survey and e-mailed a link to the survey to approximately 9,500 front-line child protection professionals from all 50 states. Approximately 2,500 recipients clicked on the link to survey and, of these, 720 professionals took the full survey. There were several important findings:

### 1. The vast majority of respondents were front-line professionals, most of them actively practicing as forensic interviewers

Specifically, 79.6% of the respondents were currently practicing as forensic interviewers, and only 4.8% of the respondents had never practiced. Since front-line forensic interviewers are the subject of a credentialing process, the large response from current professionals may be the best data we have thus far in assessing support for credentialing from those in the field.

### 2. The respondents came from all regions of the country

Respondents came from 48 states plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico and closely paralleled the number of accredited children's advocacy centers in each region. The federal government funds four regional children's advocacy centers to oversee the growth of CACs in the United States (Chandler, 2006). The correlation between the percentages of respondents from each region of the country and the percentages of CACs in those regions strongly suggests the survey was dominated by forensic interviewers and other multidisciplinary team members affiliated with or otherwise influenced by the growth of CACs in their regions.

### 3. Forensic interviewers taking the survey came from CACs, law enforcement agencies, and child protection agencies

Of the respondents to the survey who stated they were actively practicing forensic interviewers or had done so in the past, 60.4% said this work was done as part of a CAC, 19.1% as a part of a CPS agency, and 16.9% as part of a law enforcement agency. Approximately 40% of the respondents were conducting forensic interviews as part of another agency.

### 4. Forensic interviewers taking the survey had diverse levels of experience

To be widely accepted in the field, a credentialing system will need to generate support from interviewers with various levels of experience. The respondents to this survey did, indeed, have diverse levels of experience. Specifically, 41.2% had conducted 0–100 forensic interviews, 41.2% had conducted 100–1000 forensic interviews, and 17.6% had conducted more than 1,000 forensic interviews.

### 5. Survey respondents had diverse educational backgrounds

Again, to gauge whether or not there is widespread support in the field, it is critical to get input from professionals with diverse back-

grounds. In terms of educational background, 10.8% had a high school or associate of arts degree, 36.3% had a bachelor's degree, 44.4% had a master's degree, and 7.3% had a doctoral degree.

### 6. More than 90% of the respondents to the survey could meet basic or advanced credentialing standards pertaining to training

One of the concerns about credentialing is that the proposed standards on training would not be attainable for many in the field. The vast majority of respondents to this survey had the experience and training levels necessary to meet the proposed standards. Specifically, 6% had no FI training, 44.2% had 40 hours, 24.5% had 50–80 hours, 14.3% had 90–160 hours, and 9.5% had more than 160 hours.

### 7. The vast majority of respondents support credentialing and basic tenets of the credentialing process proposed by NACCFI

The following percentages of respondents agreed with these statements:

- Credentialing would benefit the field (81.1%)
- Credentialing should be only for practitioners (79.8%)
- There should be an "Inactive" status for those who have not practiced for more than 2 years (75.1%)
- That experience as a forensic interviewer and participation in peer review "stand out as being more equated" to effective practice than "higher levels of education" (75.7%)
- That participation in a formalized peer review process should be a requirement for credentialing (80.8%)
- That there should be an ethical code for forensic interviewers (93.8%), that applicants should have no felony convictions within the past 10 years, and any conviction or arrest history related to crimes against children or any substantiation by a CPS agency for child maltreatment automatically disqualifies an applicant (92.1%)
- That all categories of credentialing should require three professional endorsements by colleagues (84.5%)
- That passing a competency examination should be required even for the basic credential (70.9%)
- That the initial 40 hours of training should be received from a "nationally recognized training organization, agency, or trainer," and that advanced training should also meet this criteria (88.7%).

### 8. A large percentage of respondents supported the number of training hours and actual forensic interviews required for each of the four credentialing tiers

In terms of the actual number of training hours needed to meet each credential, the largest percentage for each credential matched our original recommendation of 40 hours for the basic credential (52.7%), 80 for the intermediate (56.9%), 120 for the advanced (51.4%), and 160 for the Diplomate status (40.2%, although a solid 26.6% said it should be 240 or more hours of forensic inter-



view training). In terms of the actual number of forensic interviews conducted for each credential, the largest percentage of approval for each credential matched our original recommendation of 0 for the basic credential (35.9%), 25 for the intermediate (29.3%), 100 for the advanced (38.6%), and 1,000 for the Diplomate status (35.5%, although a solid 25.7% said 500 or more forensic interviews would be sufficient for this credential). NACCFI has subsequently lowered the number of interviews for its Diplomate status to 500. Although there is some aspect of arbitrariness to setting numbers of training hours or actual interviews, the response to the survey suggests that the NACCFI proposal is within the range of what will be widely accepted in the field.

## The Case for the Credentialing of Forensic Interviewers

Whatever the final credentialing process looks like, there are at least ten strong arguments for moving in this direction:

### **1. In cases of child sexual abuse, the competence of forensic interviewers may be more important than the competence of any other member of the multidisciplinary team**

Although the taking of a child's statement is important in all cases of child abuse, the taking of the child's statement is critical in cases of sexual abuse. In a case of physical abuse or a homicide, the child's brain, eyes, bones, and skin provide the crucial evidence. In sexual abuse, the child's body rarely produces evidence (Heger et al., 2002). Instead, the child's words are most critical. It is from these words that police officers can search for corroborating evidence, child protection workers can better assess the risks the child is facing, medical professionals can assure the child that his or her body is intact, mental health professionals can help a child cope with the emotions associated with child maltreatment, and prosecutors can prove an allegation in a court of law (Johnson, 2009; Vieth 2009a). Without the child's words, the work of every other member of the team is muted, if not wholly irrelevant. In the event the case results in civil or criminal proceedings, the child's words and the collection of these words are closely scrutinized by court and counsel and by thousands of jurors old enough to remember the high-profile day-care cases of the mid-1980s and who are worried that little has changed (Hechler, 1988).

Moreover, there is little dispute that it is possible to taint a child's memory (Ceci, 1999). For the sake of the accused, the forensic interviewer must be competent—and then some. It is also not disputed that some children, no matter how poorly they were interviewed, may be truthfully and accurately recounting a history of child sexual abuse (Russell, 2009). The statements of these children should not be tossed out of prosecutors' offices or from courts of law, and their abusers should not be set free simply because the child had the misfortune of being interviewed by an investigator

poorly trained or otherwise poorly equipped to collect this evidence. A national credentialing of forensic interviewers—a credentialing that requires a base level of training, ongoing training, actual work in the field, peer review of that work, and a testing of knowledge does not eliminate incompetence in the field, but it will ensure every maltreated child that the person who interviews him or her at least meets minimal standards.

### **2. Credentialing will establish not only minimal standards for entry into the profession of forensic interviewing—but also minimal continuing education standards for remaining in the profession**

Credentialing is also a mechanism to ensure that practitioners not only meet minimal standards but also continue to receive training or otherwise access resources that will help them grow professionally. To meet the intermediate, advanced, or Diplomate status, forensic interviewers must attend continuing education specifically pertaining to forensic interviewing, as well as ongoing peer review and adherence to an ethical code. The requirement of ongoing training is a characteristic of most of the members of MDTs, including prosecutors (Minnesota Board of Continuing Legal Education, 2011), social workers, and law enforcement officers. Given the critical nature of remaining current in this field, forensic interviewers should also develop and adhere to continuing education standards.

### **3. Credentialing will not only assist in establishing minimal standards for entering or remaining in the field—but it will also assist in developing an ethical code for the profession**

If forensic interviewers are also psychologists or members of some other profession, they have some national standards, many of them strictly enforced, governing their ethical behavior. However, there are not any national ethical standards specifically pertaining to the work of forensic interviewers. Standards designed for a psychologist, social worker, or some other profession may be of assistance to the forensic interviewer, but they will not help the interviewer in many instances. In developing an ethical code for forensic interviewers, it will not be necessary to start from scratch. Forensic interviewers who are members of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC) must adhere to the APSAC *Code of Ethics* (Conte & APSAC, 1997). This code requires APSAC members to “routinely receive supervision, consultation, or counsel with more experienced colleagues or peers” and to have their work “subjected to periodic review, evaluation, or consultation.” APSAC members are also prohibited from representing themselves to “hold expertise, knowledge, or qualifications which they do not in fact possess, including when providing expert testimony, writing, or providing education to professionals or lay persons alike.” Moreover, APSAC members must act in compliance with applicable laws and regulations and “will participate at least annually in high-quality professional education” (Everson & APSAC, 1995).

The NACCFI has an ethical code that requires its members to participate in “ongoing training, supervision, and peer review of their interviews.” The ethical code also addresses the usage of foreign language interpreters, interview aids, the security of the forensic interview tape, and handling conflicts of interest. The ethical code promotes the interviewing of children in child friendly environments, to conduct forensic interviews in the language the “child knows best,” and to avoid “stereotyping, profiling, or discriminating” against children or others on the basis of “gender, age, handicap, ability, economic status, family structure, lifestyle, ethnicity, religion, language, culture, national origin, or sexual orientation” (NACCFI, 2011). The ethical code prohibits forensic interviewers from becoming “sexually, physically, or romantically involved” with the children or families they work with even if the child or family member is of legal age. An NACCFI forensic interviewer is not allowed to “withhold, alter, influence, coerce, or falsify information for the purposes of affecting the outcome of an interview or a case” (Russell, 2010). The NACCFI code also provides interviewers guidance on what to do when a fellow team member is engaging in unethical conduct.

The existing APSAC code of ethics and the proposed NACCFI code of ethics provide the basis for at least developing a minimal code of ethics for front-line forensic interviewers. As the field grows, the code of ethics can expand or otherwise adapt to emerging ethical issues the field faces. In our judgment, the key is for front-line interviewers themselves, those who actually do the work and who confront these issues, to take a leadership role in the ongoing development of this code of ethics.

#### **4. Credentialing that includes the development of an ethical code may also assist in removing unethical practitioners from the field**

The development of an ethical code will not only assist those practitioners actively seeking to maintain high ethical standards, but it may also provide a mechanism for sanctioning or revoking the credentials of those who consciously choose to engage in unethical behavior. Although this sort of conduct is rare—as is egregious conduct for most professions—the point is that other professions have a mechanism for revoking the credentials of



those who insist on engaging in unethical behavior. It is in the best interests of children for the field of forensic interviewing to follow the lead of the other professions who make up our MDTs and to develop an ethical code. An ethical code, combined with some mechanism for enforcement, will also assist in reigning in less egregious but equally troubling behavior—such as by those who refuse to interview children in a child friendly, neutral environment or who claim that peer review is pointless and simply choose not to participate. Although removing these individuals from the ranks of those interviewers who are credentialed may not necessarily cause their behavior to stop, it will allow those who maintain the standard to clearly distinguish themselves from those whose conduct is concerning, if not blatantly unethical.

#### **5. Credentialing will extend the minimal standards in place at CACs to all interviewers and will provide recognition for forensic interviewers who exceed minimal standards**

The National Children’s Alliance, the body that accredits children’s advocacy centers, recognizes the critical role of the forensic interview, especially in cases of sexual abuse. Specifically, the NCA accreditation standards provide the following:

Forensic interviews are typically the cornerstone of a child abuse investigation, effective child protection, and subsequent prosecution, and they may be the beginning of the road toward healing for many children and families. The manner in which a child is treated during the initial forensic interview may significantly impact the child’s understanding of, and ability to respond to, the intervention process or criminal justice system, or both. Quality interviewing involves

an appropriate, neutral setting; effective communication among MDT members; employment of legally sound interviewing techniques; and the selection, training, and supervision of interviewers.

Interviews must be conducted in a manner that is “legally-sound, non-duplicative, non-leading, and neutral,” other MDT members must be “routinely present,” the interviews should be “routinely conducted” at the CAC, and forensic interviewers must receive at least 3 hours of continuing education every 2 years and participate in a “formalized peer review process.” Moreover, a multi-tiered credentialing program will also recognize those forensic interviewers both in and outside of CACs who have far surpassed these minimal standards.

### **6. A credentialing association made up of practicing forensic interviewers will ensure that standards for the field are determined by those who actually do the work**

The prosecutors, law enforcement officers, social workers, psychologists, and medical professionals serving on our MDTs have developed independent credentialing or licensure standards, including an ethical code for their respective professions. These professions publish journals specifically related to their work and otherwise grow their respective fields separate and apart from the other disciplines with which they work. These and other medical, mental health, and legal professions do not allow others from outside their disciplines to determine the standards for their respective professions. This is not the case in the field of forensic interviewing. In the field of forensic interviewing, we routinely have doctors, lawyers, psychologists, researchers, linguists, and college professors—most of whom have never conducted a forensic interview—routinely publishing articles, offering workshops, or even testifying in court as to what are the best practices in the field of forensic interviewing (Vieth, 2009b).

This is not to say that other disciplines do not play an important role in the forensic interview process as a great many disciplines have a role in the forensic interview process and their input is critical. Although forensic interviewers must draw upon the expertise of these and many other professionals, and they must ensure that the forensic interview meets the needs of the team members, it is the forensic interviewers themselves who should determine the minimal credentials for beginning or continuing to work in this field. If not, they run the risk that the standards for their field will be dictated by those who do not actually work as forensic interviewers.

### **7. Credentialing may be helpful to the prosecutor in qualifying a forensic interviewer as an expert witness**

A decade ago, the idea of having a forensic interviewer testify as an expert witness in a court of law was simply unheard of. Largely as a result of the growth of national and state forensic interviewing courses, appellate courts from at least ten different states have considered this issue for the first time and, with only a handful of

exceptions, these courts have ruled that forensic interviewers meeting certain standards can testify as an expert. For those prosecutors who want the option of qualifying the forensic interviewer as an expert witness, a credible credentialing process will help make the case. Although the process of qualifying a forensic interviewer as an expert witness is complicated and varies from state to state, essentially the prosecutor has to prove that forensic interviewing techniques have been published and subjected to peer review, that the techniques have been tested, that forensic interviewing is widely accepted in the field, that there is a known or potential error rate, that there is some commonality among interviewing protocols, *and that there are national standards or guidelines governing forensic interviewing.*

Of course, even without these standards, prosecutors and interviewers have a lot of options. Forensic interviewers working in a CAC can and should cite the NCA standards and members of APSAC can cite that organization’s forensic interviewing guidelines (Everson et al. & APSAC, 2002) as well as the ASPAC guidelines on the usage of anatomical dolls (Everson & APSAC, 1995).

### **8. Credentialing may assist the prosecutor in limiting or excluding the testimony of defense experts**

A credible credentialing process will aid the prosecutor in arguing to trial and appellate courts for the exclusion or at least limiting of the testimony of defense “experts” who have never conducted a forensic interview. If defense attorneys still wish to call various psychologists, researchers, or other academics to the witness stand, their testimony should be limited to their field of expertise. In other words, a psychologist may be able to talk about how memory is coded, retained, or retrieved or any other issue pertaining to a child’s statement provided it is within the professional’s expertise. However, the psychologist should not be testifying as to best practices or even current practices in a field he or she is not part of. If forensic interviewing evolves into its own profession, complete with ethical and other standards, this may limit if not exclude the testimony of many defense experts. There is some indication that appellate courts are willing to limit the testimony of experts if the case can be made that an expert is not directly involved in the work of forensic interviewing or is otherwise unfamiliar with specific interviewing protocols or other specific tools or work conducted for an interviewer.

### **9. Credentialing is as important to the children of tomorrow as it is to the children of today**

In considering the issue of credentialing, it is important to think not only about the children we are currently working with or may be working with in the immediate future. It is also critical to think of children who may be referred for a forensic interview decades from now. If credentialing had been developed 20 years ago, we would have a much better sense of what does or doesn’t work in terms of establishing minimal standards or reigning in negligent or even unethical behavior. Although any credentialing process we begin today will be flawed, it will nonetheless allow us



to discern these flaws and improve the system for the next wave of maltreated children. If we wait until that next generation is upon us, we may be largely starting from scratch again.

### **10. This is the generation ideally qualified to develop a credentialing process**

We still have in our field professionals old enough to remember the day care cases of the mid-1980s and who were on the forefront of developing children's advocacy centers, multidisciplinary teams, and national and state forensic interviewing courses (Hechler, 1988; Chandler, 2006). A large body of the research on forensic interviewing, including most of the best research, has been conducted by researchers who are currently still with us. This is an ideal time to draw upon our shared experiences and seize this moment in history. We may not get it exactly right, but surely we have the capacity to develop the field of forensic interviewing as a profession or at least a very unique skill that requires the development and adherence to minimal standards.

## **Addressing Concerns About Credentialing**

As the debate about credentialing has unfolded, child protection professionals have raised a number of valid concerns. Two of the most commonly raised concerns are as follows:

### **1. Will a credentialing process hurt those forensic interviewers who cannot meet the standards?**

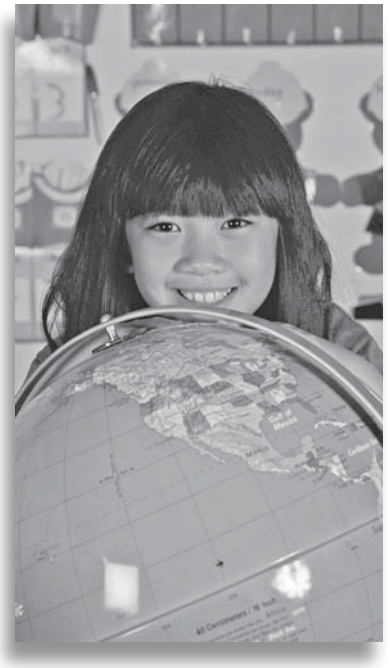
This is a valid concern, particularly if the only tier of the credentialing process were the Diplomate status we have discussed. However, in establishing an initial tier that is compatible with the existing NCA standards, this is something that can be obtained by nearly every child protection professional in the United States. Indeed, in a recent survey of CACs, *all* of the forensic interviewers responding to this survey had been trained through at least one of the major national or state forensic interviewing courses, and more than 80% were participating in peer review (Regional Children's Advocacy Center, 2009). If the concern is that interviewers who fail to meet even the minimal standards set by the NCA will be attacked, this issue is already upon us. Since the NCA standards are already in place, these standards can be used to attack forensic interviewers both in and outside of CACs who fail to receive quality forensic interview training, who fail to participate in peer review, or who otherwise fail to adhere to better practices in the field. In other words, the multi-tiered credentialing process outlined in this paper does not give attorneys an attack they don't already have.

It is also important to make a distinction between those who cannot meet minimal standards and those who choose not to. Although we can and should do everything possible to expand training options for those who cannot currently take advantage of these opportunities, we should not be protective of those forensic interviewers who have these opportunities available to them but choose not to take advantage of them. Finally, and most impor-

tant, MDTs need to recognize that attorneys will attack the field of forensic interviewing no matter what decisions the field makes. Those who oppose credentialing because they fear a defense attack may be surprised when they are cross examined for being part of a field that currently has no national association, no ethical code, and no minimal standards applicable to all who call themselves forensic interviewers. It is true that forensic interviewers who meet only minimal standards will be attacked by defense counsel for not having met intermediate or advanced standards. This, though, is true for every profession. A treating physician may be attacked for not being board certified in a certain field. A pediatrician may be attacked for not meeting the criteria for certification as a child abuse subspecialist. Each of these professionals, though, is still able to meet enough national standards to have some measure of credibility in courts of law. Similarly, a forensic interviewer who has not yet had enough experience or training to be recognized as a Diplomate in the field will nonetheless be able to say he or she meets national standards to work in this field.

### **2. For MDTs that have limited resources, is it not better to put money into training and peer review as opposed to a credentialing process?**

MDTs can and should put their dollars into high-quality forensic interview training and peer review. Having said this, teams that make this investment should be recognized for having put more resources into the growth of their forensic interviewers. Simply put, a team that sends its forensic interviewer to a 2-hour workshop should not be placed in the same category as a team that has sent its forensic interviewer through hundreds of hours of basic and advanced training and that has participated in dozens of peer reviews. Moreover, a national association of forensic interviewers that collects a modest fee from its members may actually save these teams money, provided that some of this money can be used to develop more training options and to lower the costs associated with existing trainings. NACCFI is very much aware of limited resources in the field and, working with each of you, is committed to developing a credentialing process that does not unfairly burden front-line professionals. Consistent with what APSAC has done for its members, a sliding fee scale may be appropriate.



## Conclusion

In recent decades, forensic interviewing has dramatically improved in the United States. The growth of Child Advocacy Centers and the development of numerous national and state forensic interviewing courses incorporating pertinent research have made a significant difference in the quality of these interviews and in the lives of the children for whom this is all about. It is for this reason that many forensic interviewers believe the field is ready to take the next step in developing forensic interviewing as a profession, complete with an ethical code and other standards for the field. If this is, indeed, the consensus of forensic interviewers, then it is important to develop an infrastructure that will give these interviewers the opportunity to take this next step.

## References

- American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC). (2010, Fall). APSAC's position on forensic interviewer certification. *APSAC Advisor*, 22(4), 31.
- Ceci, S. J. (1999). *Jeopardy in the courtroom: A scientific analysis of children's testimony*. Washington, DC: APA.
- Chandler, N. (2006). Children's advocacy centers: Making a difference one child at a time. *Hamline Journal of Public Law & Policy*, 28(1), 315–337.
- Conte, J., & American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC). (1997). *Code of ethics* [Practice Guidelines]. Elmhurst, IL: APSAC.
- Everson, M., & American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC). (1995). *Use of anatomical dolls in child sexual abuse assessments* [Practice Guidelines]. Elmhurst, IL: APSAC.
- Everson, M. et al., & American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC). (2002). *Investigative interviewing in cases of alleged child abuse* [Practice Guidelines]. Elmhurst, IL: APSAC.
- Haney, M. L., Conte, J., Berson, I., & MacFarlane, K. (2008, June). *Diplomate in forensic interviewing*. Paper presented at APSAC Colloquium, Phoenix, AZ.
- Hechler, D. (1988). *The battle and the backlash*. New York: Macmillan.
- Heger, A. H., Ticson, L., Velasquez, O., & Bernier, R. (2002). Children referred for possible sexual abuse: Medical finding in 2384 children. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 26(6–7), 645–659.
- Johnson, M. (2009). The investigative windows of opportunity: The vital link to corroboration in child sexual abuse cases. *CenterPiece*, 2(9), 1–4.
- Minnesota Board of Continuing Legal Education. (2011). *Rules of the Minnesota State Board of Continuing Education*. Retrieved from: [www.mbcle.state.mn.us](http://www.mbcle.state.mn.us)
- National Association of Certified Child Forensic Interviewers (NACCFI). (2011). *Code of practice principles, standards, and ethical conduct*. Retrieved from: [www.nacffi.com](http://www.nacffi.com)
- National Children's Alliance (NCA). (2008). *Standards for accredited members* (Revised). Available at: <http://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org>
- Regional Children's Advocacy Centers. (2009). *Forensic interviewing practice survey*. Huntsville, AL: Author. For a copy, contact the National Child Protection Training Center at: [www.ncptc.org](http://www.ncptc.org)
- Russell, A. (2009). Assessing children's statements for investigative and court purposes. *CenterPiece*, 1(6), 1–6. Retrieved from: [www.ncptc.org](http://www.ncptc.org)
- Russell, A. (2010). Finding equilibrium: *Greene v. Camreta*. *CenterPiece*, 2(1), 1–6.
- Vieth, V. I. (2009a). Picture this: Photographing a child sexual abuse crime scene. *CenterPiece*, 1(5), 1–4.
- Vieth, V. I. (2009b). The forensic interviewer at trial: Guidelines for the admission and scope of expert witness testimony concerning an investigative interview in a case of child abuse. *William Mitchell Law Review*, 36(1), 186–219.
- Vieth, V. I. (2010). *It's time to swim: A proposal for developing a multi-tiered approach to the credentialing of forensic interviewers*. Retrieved from the National Child Protection Training Center (see "publications"): [www.ncptc.org](http://www.ncptc.org)

## About the Authors

Michael L. Haney, PhD, is a forensic and mental health consultant. He has extensive background in child abuse and forensic interviewing. He is a Nationally Certified Counselor, a Critical Incident Stress Manager, and a Licensed Mental Health Counselor. Dr. Haney is a member of the Board of Directors for the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children. He has coauthored several articles and research projects and a book chapter on child abuse. Contact: [drmikelhaney@gmail.com](mailto:drmikelhaney@gmail.com).

Victor I. Vieth, JD, serves as the Director of the National Child Protection Training Center (NCPTC), located on the campus of Winona State University (WSU). He has trained thousands of child protection professionals on numerous topics pertaining to child abuse investigations, prosecutions, and prevention. He has published countless articles related to the investigation, prosecution, and prevention of child abuse and neglect and is also the author of *Unto the Third Generation*, a bold initiative that outlines the necessary steps we must all take to eliminate child abuse in America in three generations. Contact: [VVieth@ncptc.org](mailto:VVieth@ncptc.org).

Hector M. Campos, MSW, LCSW, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) with 22 years of clinical practice experience. Hector received his bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice in 1986, and his MSW in 1989 from ECU. Hector started his social work career in 1986 at the Pitt County Department of Social Services, Greenville, NC. For the past 14 years, he has been employed by the Department of Defense as a Family Advocacy Program (FAP) as a case manager for the Marine Corps, Army, and presently, the NAVY. He serves as Chairman of the Certification Board for the National Association of Certified Child Forensic Interviewers (NACCFI). Contact: [hector.m.campos@navy.mil](mailto:hector.m.campos@navy.mil).