

GUEST EDITORIAL



*Richard C. Froede, M.D.
Associate Editor*

As the last years of the 20th Century become history, we forensic scientists must examine our accomplishments, our faults, and our problems. We must assess our future. Are we prepared to continue successfully our search for truth in civil, criminal, and social behavioral matters? Will we effectively use all the needed sciences in our search? Will we help insure that injustice shall not be done to any member of society?

The American Academy of Forensic Sciences and the Forensic Sciences Foundation, as well as individual members, have been extremely active in defining who the forensic scientist is and the role of the forensic scientist in the community. Nevertheless, many in the public sector and governmental jurisdictions still have no clear perception of who the forensic scientist is or even care what the scientist does. It is also unfortunate that negative publicity may be generated by the adversarial role that we must, on occasion, take in our judicial system. Sometimes the legal profession "gleefully" pits us one against another. This only reinforces stereotypes of our profession.

In our hi-tech society, modalities are available that were unknown or unavailable five to

ten years ago. The computer sciences are revolutionizing our work; technological advances in the biological sciences, criminalistics, and engineering areas are overwhelming. There are opportunities to use these advances to improve our abilities to serve the community. Again, fortunately or unfortunately, our increased success in presenting our image has created a demand by law enforcement, the legal profession, and the courts to utilize these technological capabilities.

However, the current problem is not ultimately the use of these technological advances, communication systems, and sociologic information. As James Ferris, President of the International Association of Forensic Sciences, has stated, "there is a worldwide shortage of funds threatening the forensic sciences." Without funds, all of our technological advances will be for nought.

Many of our laboratories and offices are antiquated. Budgets are restricted, and the community priorities often leave the forensic scientist at the bottom of budget concerns. The forensic sciences are essentially in a noncompetitive posture with other sciences and industry. Pay scales and other resources are often at the lowest levels.

What can we do? We must work together and provide support for recognition of our profession. We must develop our skills and, in a spirit of cooperation, provide research data for our profession by proper use of our national, state, and local organizations. We approach the 21st Century. We must be prepared to leave the 20th Century and insure at the same time that we have completely left the 19th Century restrictions.

*Richard C. Froede, M.D.
Distinguished scientist
Armed Forces Institute of Pathology
Washington, DC*