

# FEEDBACK

## A Newsletter of the Child Medical Evaluation Program

### SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- > CONTESTED ISSUES IN "THE EVALUATION OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE"
- > LETTERS OF AGREEMENT
- > CREDENTIALING INFO
- > UPCOMING TRAINING DATES

### Contested Issues in "The Evaluation of Child Sexual Abuse"

Mark D. Everson

Many CFE examiners are familiar with Kathryn Kuehnle's book, "Assessing Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse." In its day, this book published in 1996 was a highly valuable resource. In 2009, Kuehnle joined with Mary Connell in editing a more current volume, entitled, "The Evaluation of Child Sexual Abuse Allegation: A Comprehensive Guide to Assessment and Testimony." The Kuehnle and Connell book includes 20 chapters written by scholars with diverse areas of expertise, such as clinical decision making, child forensic interviewing, research on memory and suggestibility, and professional ethics. The majority of chapters offer excellent reviews of relevant literature as well as practical guidelines for forensic evaluators seeking to update to best practice standards. However, at least four chapters in the Kuehnle and Connell (2009) book challenge, if not condemn, the validity of long-established forensic methodology (Faust, Bridges and Ahern, 2009a, 2009b; Bridges, Faust, and Ahern, 2009; Herman, 2009). Specifically, Faust and colleagues argue that behavioral indicators of possible abuse, such as sexualized behavior, have limited diagnostic utility in evaluations of alleged CSA, while Herman makes a similar case concerning the alleged child victim's disclosure statement. Furthermore, these authors claim that substantiation decisions relying on such evidence may produce false positive rates of almost 50% (Herman, 2009, p. 259) and, in some circumstances, more false positive errors than true positive identifications (Faust, et al, 2009b, p. 51). On the basis of such error estimates, Herman condemns current forensic practice as invalid and unethical and calls for "drastic reforms" in the assessment and adjudication process (Herman, 2009, p.259). His proposed reforms include limiting substantiation only to cases with definitive evidence such as diagnostic medical findings, a credible eyewitness, or a perpetrator confession.

Because of concerns that such criticisms of established practice may be mistaken as settled science or expert consensus, Kathleen Faller and I assembled a group of experienced forensic evaluators and respected child maltreatment researchers to prepare articles that challenge the most troubling chapters in the Kuehnle and Connell book. The resulting six articles were published as a recent special issue on Journal of Child Sexual Abuse (2012, 21, (1)) entitled, "Contested Issues in the Evaluation of Child Sexual Abuse Evaluations." The articles include Faller and Everson (2012); Lyon, Ahern and Scurich (2012); Everson and Faller (2012); Everson, Sandoval, Berson, Crowson and Robinson (2012); Cross, Fine, Jones and Walsh (2012) and Olafson (2012). Commentaries on the special issue articles were published in the subsequent issue of JCSA (2012, 21, (2)) and included rebuttals by the authors of the four original chapters from Kuehnle and Connell (2009) that had evoked the debate.

The Kuehnle and Connell book has much to recommend it, but it presents only a one-sided position on a number of critical issues. For a more balanced perspective, we recommend that CFE examiners also read relevant articles from the JCSA special issue as well as the rebuttal and commentary articles published in the following journal issue. The CFE office has several of the JCSA articles and can make them available. If you are interested, please email Gina Cochran at [gcochran@med.unc.edu](mailto:gcochran@med.unc.edu).

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**CONTESTED ISSUES, CONT'D.**

**References**

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Lyon, T.D., Ahern, E.C., & Scurich, N. (2012). Interviewing children versus tossing coins: Accurately assessing the diagnosticity of children's disclosures of abuse. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 21* (1), 19-44.

Olafson, E. (2012). A call for field-relevant research about child forensic interviewing for child protection. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 21* (1), 109-129.

## **LETTERS OF AGREEMENT**

We will be sending out the usual letters of agreement to all of our providers after July 1, 2012. Please sign and return the letter to the CMEP office as this detail is necessary in order to remit payment for CMEP paid evaluations.

## **CREDENTIALING FOR CMEP**

Medical providers are required to have 10 hours of continuing education in child abuse & neglect every two years to remain credentialed with the program. These hours do not have to be Category 1 CME. We have developed a document that will provide you with online resources for containing free continuing education hours for the purposes of meeting our needs. You may request this document at any time but it is also mailed to providers when their credentialing is about to expire.

Please feel free to submit any of the education on child abuse & neglect that you have attained through other conferences, meetings, inservices, etc. We will record those hours in our database.

We also provide 1 hour of continuing education for attendance at our monthly webinars. Unfortunately, we are not able to award Category 1 CME as we have done in the past. We are still working on this with the School of Medicine.

## **UPCOMING TRAINING**

Please periodically check our website for upcoming trainings <http://www.med.unc.edu/cmep/services/cmep-training>

The **18th Annual Symposium on Child Abuse and Neglect & CACNC Child Medical Training** is scheduled for September 25-27, 2012 at Lake Junaluska, near Waynesville, NC. We feel we have an exciting agenda for both the MDT and the Medical Training. Topics for the Medical Training will include *Drug Endangered Children, Child Abuse Radiology, Evaluation of Burns, Legal Issues and Testimony in AHT Cases, Review of the Current Scientific Literature on Child Maltreatment, Invisible Children, and You Make The Call Case Studies*.

Watch the Child Advocacy Centers of NC website: [cacnc.org](http://cacnc.org) for more information about the training.

