

CLIVE & JILL
WILLOWS

Telephone : (033)
Rooms : 3451185
Home : 3943399
Fax : 086 5108744
Cell : 0825629951

Clinical Psychologists
Pr. No. 8628386

327 Bulwer Street
Pietermaritzburg
3201
cwillows@iafrica.com

Dear

Psycho-forensic workshop: Call for Expression of Interest

I am writing this in order to gauge the opinions of psychologists and psychiatrists in SA who are engaged in forensic matters and who may share my opinion that we are in need of a workshop to consider, in depth and from experience, some of the recurring, controversial and challenging issues on which we are required to express “expert” opinion during court proceedings.

These are areas in which divergent opinions have been expressed between colleagues within the acrimonious court environment. Whilst vigorous debate has merit, a consequence is that the court is correctly concluding that mental health professionals seldom have a shared understanding of critical issues that are, supposedly, originating from an objective, scientific field of study. As a consequence the Court is placing less emphasis on the conclusions emanating from professions which are fragmented in their understanding of the issues at hand. As professions we have not done much to raise our credibility.

There are, and have been, numerous local presentations and conferences on forensic psychology that tend to focus on “introductory” issues – often aimed at the practitioner who accidentally and reluctantly finds themselves in court as an expert witness. I believe we need a (2 day) workshop to address issues beyond these introductory principles and content. The workshop I have in mind will be more specialised and therefore unlikely to attract wide interest or participation. Neither is it likely to attract financial investment from a sponsor. Participants may need to commit to fund themselves, and presenters cannot be expected to be adequately refunded.

This letter is being sent without any wish to exclude willing participants. I would encourage recipients to forward to those whom they believe may share an interest in participating.

The aim of the workshop would thus be to accumulate the shared knowledge and experience of mental health professionals, to improve the quality of the content of presentations in court and to hopefully establish some agreed principles in order to limit ill-informed adversarial argument between professionals. The fairly recent publication of two South African textbooks on the subject of psycho-forensics suggests to me that the time is right for this type of forum.

Do you think there is a need for such a workshop?
Would you be interested in participating as an attendee?
Would you be interested in presenting or being on a panel? If so on what topic?
Do you have suggestions of topics or key issues requiring discussion?

I will look forward to your response – and from those to whom you may forward this letter. Kindly reply to the above email address.

Regards
Clive Willows
Attached: Suggested workshop format and content.