



THE FQS UPDATE



WELCOME TO “THE FQS UPDATE”

This will be my last newsletter as the FQS-I Manager of Accreditations, as I am moving on to other opportunities in the forensic science field. My tenure at FQS has been a rewarding experience and I would like to thank all of those with whom I have worked—customers, co-workers, assessors, and peers—for making it so. Information about all FQS staffing changes is provided in this quarter’s cover article.

Pat Wojtowicz, Manager of Accreditations, FQS-I

STAFFING CHANGES AT FQS

Significant staffing changes are taking place at Forensic Quality Services.

FQS-I Manager of Accreditations Pat Wojtowicz will resign her position effective October 31, 2008, to become Deputy Director of the Forensic Biology Laboratory of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in New York City. Her last day in the FQS office will be October 24. FQS is pleased to announce that Randall Robbins will succeed her as the Manager of Accreditations. Randy recently retired after 30+ years with the Illinois State Police, the last 13 of which were as the Director of Quality Assurance. During his career he was a drug chemist and trace analyst before becoming an Assistant Laboratory Director, then moving into the QA role, where he oversaw all aspects of the Quality Assurance Program, including audits and maintenance of accreditation. He has a BA (Chemistry) from Central Methodist College in Missouri, and is a charter member and Past-President of the Association of Forensic Quality Managers (AFQAM), a Past-President of the Midwestern Association of Forensic Scientists (MAFS), a Fellow of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS) and a Senior Member of the American Society for Quality (ASQ). He has a vast knowledge of ISO 17025 accreditation and the FQS-I accreditation program. Randy will join FQS in mid-October to allow for a transition period before Pat’s departure. Randy will be based at his home in Illinois.

FQS Business Manager Katy Savage resigned from FQS at the end of August to take a faculty position with the Forensic Science department at Strathclyde University in Glasgow, Scotland. Katy continues her association with FQS as a consultant and instructor of “Introduction to Forensic Science”, an undergraduate level distance learning course that FQS offers in collaboration with the University of South Florida. FQS Office Manager Vickie Holm and FQS President Sudhir Sinha are managing all other non-accreditation business activities and requests until a Project Coordinator has been hired (see below).

Efforts are currently underway to hire a “Project Coordinator” to work full-time from the FQS office in Clearwater, FL. The Project Coordinator will be responsible for managing requests for the training, education, and consultation services provided by FQS and will also provide assistance to the Manager of Accreditations.

Please check the FQS web site (www.forquality.org) frequently for updates to staff contact information, as it will be revised over the next few weeks.

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FQS CALENDAR OF ACTIVITIES

November 10-12, 2008: “ISO Without Tears”, FQS Workshop, Clearwater, FL

MAKING THE TRANSITION TO ISO 17025 by Pat Wojtowicz, FQS-I Manager of Accreditations

The program of the recent American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors (ASCLD) symposium in Salt Lake City, Utah contained a plenary session on the topic "Making the Transition to ISO." The ASCLD meeting planners wanted a focus on the differences between ISO 17025 accreditation programs and previous "non-ISO" programs, including information on how labs can ready themselves. They hoped to take some of the mystery out of ISO 17025 so that more labs will be convinced to take this accreditation step. I was honored to be a presenter during that plenary session and to be able to present the FQS-I perspective on that topic.

The FQS-I business unit of Forensic Quality Services (FQS) offers an ISO/IEC 17025 accreditation program for public and private sector agencies involved in forensic testing. FQS previously offered a "DNA Accreditation" program, which was based solely upon conformance with the FBI's Quality Assurance Standards for DNA Testing. FQS's accreditation program history for both ISO and non-ISO accreditations dates back to the time it was a business unit of the National Forensic Science Technology Center (NFSTC); however, FQS became an independent, not-for-profit corporation in October 2003 and continued to offer both accreditation services. FQS began to phase out "DNA Accreditation" starting in 2005, so that by early 2008 the last laboratory had transitioned to ISO/IEC 17025 accreditation.

ISO/IEC 17025 emphasizes the importance of a well-defined management system as a basis for quality in testing. The Standard provides the outline for how a laboratory management system must be structured, but it is up to each agency to "fill in the details" in an appropriate way. This focus on the *system* helps to deflect attacks based upon bias and individual competence.

Preparing for ISO/IEC 17025 accreditation is no different than preparing for any other accreditation or audit. The ISO/IEC 17025 and supplemental forensic requirements are not difficult, but there are many of them and there are "gaps" with the FBI DNA QAS and other non-ISO/IEC 17025 standards. Most "gaps" are with respect to the Section 4 "management" clauses of ISO/IEC 17025, those elements that are non-technical in nature and typically laboratory-wide in application, for example, document control, purchasing, corrective actions, and internal audit programs. Of course, even where there are similarities between ISO and non-ISO requirements the correlations are not always exact. Therefore an agency preparing for ISO/IEC 17025 accreditation must:

- ◆ **Become familiar with the accreditation requirements.** Attend workshops; train staff; read guidebooks; study guidance documents from ISO and the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC); talk to colleagues in laboratories accredited to ISO/IEC 17025; involve multiple staff members to increase "buy-in".
- ◆ **Identify the "gaps" in laboratory conformance with the standards.** Conduct internal and/or external audits; record specific, objective evidence of conformity or non-conformity in order to construct a conformance file. Most laboratories that are accredited to a non-ISO 17025 standard will probably be pleasantly surprised to find out how many requirements they already meet.
- ◆ **Bridge the "gaps".** Create a project plan to correct the non-conformities, concentrating on ISO "hot spots" such as document control if time is short; write/revise the laboratory

Quality Manual, policies, and procedures as needed; train staff on the new and revised policies and procedures; conduct follow-up audits to measure the progress of implementation.

Because it will take time, effort, and funding to accomplish these steps, it is critical that accreditation efforts have the support of the laboratory's senior management. It is also important that the quality manager, a staff position mandated by ISO/IEC 17025, be selected early in the preparation process. This is because someone has to be responsible for moving the process along or it may get bogged down.

A few examples of pitfalls that can trap the unwary follow. FQS-I has seen these issues in a number of laboratories going through their initial ISO assessments:

- ◆ Deficiencies in written policies and procedures for Section 4 requirements. This has included:
 - ◆ Failure to distinguish between what is "policy" and what is "procedure" when documenting the management system (see the article in the March 2008 "The FQS Update")
 - ◆ Failure to address in policies and/or procedures all elements required by the Standard
 - ◆ A lack of sufficient operational detail in procedures. Oftentimes this happens when agencies simply parrot the words of a clause in ISO 17025 and call it their "procedure". (This has rarely been an issue with technical procedures.)
 - ◆ A lack of objective evidence that "management" activities required by ISO 17025 are being performed, for example, no documented follow-up on corrective action reviews, findings from audits, or findings from management review.

Agencies are encouraged to take the time to thoughtfully think through processes, capture those processes in writing ("say what you do"), and then "do what you say".

MEMBER'S MEETING/BOARD OF DIRECTORS NEWS

On Thursday, September 25, 2008, the 2008 Annual Membership Meeting of Forensic Quality Services, Inc. was conducted by teleconference. A quorum was established by member submission of proxies and by attendance on the teleconference. Members who were unable to dial into the meeting may obtain a copy of the meeting minutes by sending an e-mail to FQS Office Manager Vickie Holm at vfh@forquality.org.

One of the major responsibilities of the members of FQS is to participate in the election of directors. The membership approved the slate of directors as proposed by the FQS Board of Directors. A change from the previous Board is that **Jan Johnson** of the Illinois State Police now serves in the director slot previously held by **Manny Valadez** of Texas DPS. Thanks to all of those willing to give of their time to the Board and a **special thank you to Manny for his many years of service to FQS.**

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Forensic Quality Services (FQS) provides a range of organizational assistance and training/education services to support Forensic Science delivery.

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*Forensic Quality Services-
International (FQS-I) is the country's
longest established provider of ISO
17025 accreditation to forensic testing
agencies in the U.S. It is one of the ac-
crediting bodies recognized by the
NDIS Procedures Board.*

Thank you, Manny
Valadez, for your years
of service to FQS as a
member of the Board of
Directors

ACHIEVEMENTS IN ACCREDITATION

Congratulations to the following agencies that achieved FQS-I ISO 17025 accreditation, reaccreditation, or expansion of scope of accreditation in the 2nd quarter of 2008:

Georgia Bureau of Investigation—NE and Eastern laboratories (expansion of scope)

Honolulu Police Department (reaccreditation)

Identity Genetics (reaccreditation)

North Dakota State University Forensic DNA Facility (initial accreditation)

Philadelphia Police Department (reaccreditation)



SUBMIT AN ARTICLE TO “THE FQS UPDATE”

“The FQS Update” is published quarterly in March, June, September, and December by Forensic Quality Services.

FQS welcomes submissions to this newsletter and will evaluate all such submissions with regard to their general interest to the readership. FQS reserves the right to edit submissions for length and editorial correctness. **Deadlines for submissions are March 15, June 15, September 15, and December 15.** Please send your submissions to vfh@forquality.org

Rates for ad space are as follows:

One-eighth page: \$75/issue, \$200/yr (4 issues)

One-quarter page: \$100/issue, \$300/yr (4 issues)

One-half page: \$125/issue, \$400/yr (4 issues)

Ads should be in an electronic format such as jpeg. Color or black-and-white are acceptable.

Submissions should be sent to vfh@forquality.org