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The Wisconsin ATSA Group is the first to take their conference online: A success story.

By David S. Prescott, LICSW

The announcement this week that ATSA's 2020 conference will take place online has been greeted with more than a small sigh of relief. It is difficult to comprehend all of the variables regarding conferences in the COVID-19 era. Many were concerned about the conference experience itself, given that most venues are far from designed for social distancing. Others were worried about the travel experience, anticipating the many delays as airlines seek to sanitize planes and boarding areas and wondering whether they would need to self-quarantine on arrival or on their return. Still others were ambivalent about traveling to the USA from abroad. One result is that the conference will likely become more accessible to more people as a result. Although the author is clearly biased, ATSA is deserving of major kudos for its work in migrating the conference. Many other conferences were not able to do so.

Wisconsin ATSA was the first to jump into the breach with respect to the online experience. This could not have been easy. Anxieties about connection issues, presenters' screens freezing, etc. must have been rampant behind the scenes. Fortunately, the chapter was careful to include back-up processes.

Wisconsin ATSA (WI-ATSA) has a long history of annual conferences, having featured local talent such as Michael Caldwell, Lloyd Sinclair, and David Thornton over the years as well as experts from outside the state (Robin Wilson, Andrew Harris, and Karl Hanson come immediately to mind). This year, WI-ATSA President Sharon Kelley moderated the two-day event, ably assisted by Aniss Benelmouffok from ATSA HQ, who ensured that all the technological considerations went well.

Rachel Kahn began with a brief presentation on external protective factors and supervised release adjustment, taking note of the many challenges faced by people reintegrating into



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SAJRT Bloggers' Profile

We are longtime members of ATSA dedicated to furthering the causes of evidenced-based practice, understanding, and prevention in the field of sexual abuse.

The Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers is an international, multi-disciplinary organization dedicated to preventing sexual abuse. Through research, education, and shared learning ATSA promotes evidence based practice, public policy, and community strategies that lead to the effective assessment, treatment, and management of individuals who have sexually abused or are risk to abuse.

The views expressed on this blog are of the bloggers and are not necessarily those of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers, Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research & Treatment, or Sage Journals.

the community upon their discharge from an inpatient civil commitment program (the Sand Ridge Secure Treatment Center). She took note of areas such as employment difficulties/job loss, the support of friend and peers, disruptions in family connections, and community belongingness. Next up were Gina Ambroziak and Rachel Kahn, discussing recidivism rates under supervised release and unconditional discharge from Sand Ridge. The bottom line from their presentation was that sexual recidivism while on supervised release is rare (1.5% have been charged over an average period of 2-3 years on supervised release). Even with a less inclusive definition of sexual recidivism, 93.7% of clients have been safely managed despite above-average levels of risk. Dr. Lakshmi “Luck” Subramanian then presented fascinating data on the internal factors impacting supervised release management. Although worthy of an article or two, it is worth noting that her research into how clients in treatment think about times in their life (past, present, and future) is worthy of deep consideration by any evaluator or treatment provider. Daeton Degrant and Nena Kircher rounded off the first morning with a presentation on technology monitoring and Internet safety.

Candice Christiansen spent the afternoon exploring essential elements in the assessment and treatment of people on the Autism spectrum who have sexually abused. This has been an area of very intense study for Ms. Christiansen, who is open about her own diagnosis on the spectrum. Most valuable to the author were the points she made about how best to demonstrate safety, respect, and compassion to these individuals. She further emphasized what many others have said before her: “When you’ve met one person on the spectrum, you’ve met one person on the spectrum.” In other words, highly individualized presentations are the norm when considering this area of the many populations we serve.

Dan Murrie opened up the second day with a three-hour presentation on the possible biases that forensic evaluators can experience. Dr. Murrie has produced a number of studies in this area, and the topic has received attention in this blog [before](#). Dr. Murrie’s presentation exemplified one reason why the conference experience can be so welcome. His approach to a difficult topic was measured and reasonable. His ability to discuss the issues in a way that offered ways forward for evaluators was welcome, especially in an area that can become contentious under other circumstances.

Finally, the conference experience wound down with David Delmonico and Elizabeth Griffin discussing the assessment, management, and treatment of people who offend online. As always, they succeeded in taking a very difficult topic and making it accessible to a wide range of participants. Live demonstrations of what happens in online chat, spaces were balanced with humor and the provision of resources. While one doesn’t sign up for conferences with the expectation of being treated to videos of talking dogs dishing on the presenters, it seemed the perfect counterbalance to the otherwise very powerful and emotionally charged work that professionals in our field do.

Of course, other high marks go to the audience, who participated in the chat and Q&A functions. Although not a replacement for break-time discussions by the coffee urns, there was palpable camaraderie throughout the experience. Congratulations to all at WI-ATSA.