PRESENCE OF THIRD PARTY OBSERVERS DURING NEUROPSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING
Official Statement of the National Academy of Neuropsychology
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Forensic neuropsychological evaluations are often constrained by the demand that a third party observer be present during the course of interview and formal testing. This demand may originate from counsel's desire to ensure that the neuropsychologist does not interrogate or unfairly question the plaintiff with respect to issues of liability and to ascertain if test procedures are accurately administered. In general, neuropsychologists should have the right to carry out their examination in a manner that will not in any way jeopardize, influence or unduly pressure their normal practice.

The presence of a third party observer during the administration of formal test procedures is inconsistent with recommendations promulgated in The Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (APA, 1985) and Anastasi (1988), that the psychological testing environment be distraction free. More recently, standardized test manuals (for example, The WAIS-III, WMS-III Technical Manual, 1997) have specifically stated that third party observers should be excluded from the examination room to keep it free from distraction. The presence of a third party observer in the testing room is also inconsistent with the requirements for standardized test administration as set forth in the APA's Ethical Principles Of Psychologists and Code Of Conduct (APA, 1992) in that it creates the potential for distraction and/or interruption of the examination (McSweeny, Becker, Naugle, Snow, Binder & Thompson, 1998).

A second issue that relates to the potential influence of the presence of a third party observer is the reliance upon normative data. Neuropsychological test measures have not been standardized in the presence of an observer. In fact, neuropsychological test measures have been standardized under a specific set of highly controlled circumstances that did not include the presence of a third party observer. The presence of a third party observer introduces an unknown variable into the testing environment which may prevent the examinee's performance from being compared to established norms and potentially precludes valid interpretation of the test results (McCaffrey, Fisher, Gold, & Lynch, 1996). Observer effects can be such that performance on more complex tasks declines, in contrast to enhanced performance on overlearned tasks, leading to a spuriously magnified picture of neuropsychological deficit (McCaffrey et al., 1996). Likewise, observation of an examination being conducted for a second opinion may fundamentally alter the test session, in comparison to the initial examination that the patient has already undergone, potentially creating an adversarial atmosphere, and increasing the risk of motivational
effects related to secondary gain. Observer effects can be magnified by the presence of involved parties who have a significant relationship with the patient (e.g. legal representatives who have a stake in the outcome of the examination; cf. Binder and Johnson-Greene, 1995). Thus, the presence of a third party observer during formal testing may represent a threat to the validity and reliability of the data generated by an examination conducted under these circumstances, and may compromise the valid use of normative data in interpreting test scores. Observer effects also extend to situations such as court reporters, attorneys, attorney representatives, viewing from behind one-way mirrors and to electronic means of observation, such as the presence of a camera which can be a significant distraction (McCaffrey et al., 1996). Electronic recording and other observation also raises test security considerations that are detailed in the National Academy of Neuropsychology's position statement on Test Security.

It should be noted that there are circumstances that support the presence of a neutral, non-involved party in nonforensic settings. One situation might be when students or other professionals in psychology observe testing as part of their formal education. These trainees have sufficient instruction and supervision in standardized measurement and clinical procedures, such that their presence would not interfere with the assessment process. Other situations might include a parent's calming presence during an evaluation of a child.

The weight of accumulated scientific and clinical literature with respect to the issue of third party observers in the forensic examination provides clear support for the official position of the National Academy of Neuropsychology that neuropsychologists should strive to minimize all influences that may compromise accuracy of assessment and should make every effort to exclude observers from the evaluation.

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THE USE OF NEUROPSYCHOLOGY TEST TECHNICIANS IN CLINICAL PRACTICE
Official Statement of the National Academy of Neuropsychology
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The use of neuropsychology technicians (also referred to as “technicians, psychometrists, psychometricians and psychological assistants”-p. 23, Division 40, 1989) in the supervised administration and scoring of the full range of neuropsychological tests and allied cognitive, psychological, and behavioral assessment procedures, can be traced to the late 1930’s, and it has been an established standard of practice in the field of clinical neuropsychology for more than three decades (DeLuca, 1989). This practice is not unique to neuropsychology. Other doctoral level health care practitioners also routinely employ trained non-doctoral technical personnel (e.g. radiology and EEG technicians).

The use of neuropsychology technicians helps maintain the objectivity of data collection and minimizes potential for bias associated with clinical judgment. This practice maintains reliability and validity of test administration (DeLuca, 1989).

Standards of practice exist for the selection, training, supervision and utilization of neuropsychology technicians (DeLuca, 1989; Division 40 Task Force, 1989; 1991). These standards clearly indicate that the neuropsychology technician is trained “only for the administration and scoring of psychological and neuropsychological tests” (p. 24, Division 40, 1989) and observation/reporting of test behavior. Technician training and supervision, test selection, interpretation/analysis of test data, report-writing, and neuropsychological consultation are the sole responsibility of the neuropsychologist who is licensed to practice psychology or neuropsychology. “The professional relationship in clinical neuropsychology is between the patient and the... neuropsychologist” (p. 24, Division 40, 1989). The neuropsychologist establishes and charges fees for services, and is “accountable for the quality of professional work” (p. 24, Division 40, 1989).

This official statement of the national Academy of Neuropsychology is consistent with previously published APA-Division 40 standards for education, training and supervision of non-doctoral neuropsychology technicians (Division 40, 1989, 1991). These standards are endorsed and supported by the National Academy of Neuropsychology.

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References

